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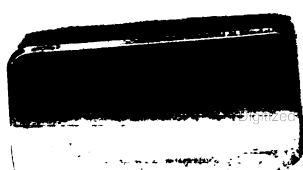


GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

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## GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

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**A BOOK OF  
CONTRADICTORY CRITICISM**



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***“There is always a place for protests against the main convention, for rebellion, paradox, partisanship and individuality, and for every personal taste that is sincere. Progress comes by contradiction. Eddies and tossing spray add to the beauty of every stream and keep the water from stagnancy.”—  
Gilbert Murray.***





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***Criticism.***—Criticism is the art of appraising that which isn't in terms of what it should be, and that which should be in terms of what it isn't. The rest—is mere hand-shaking.

§ 2

***The Dramatic Critic.***—The notion that a dramatic critic may most easily attract attention to himself and cut his way to celebrity by expressing opinions directly the opposite of those held by the overwhelming majority is ridiculous. The reverse, indeed, is true. The late William Winter was in his lifetime, and remains after his death, the most conspicuous figure in American dramatic criticism; and he never once in all his career said or wrote one single thing about the theatre that nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every one thousand Americans did not themselves stoutly believe. The theory that Shaw achieved notoriety as a critic by standing counter to the general is the theory of those alone who either have never read his criti-

cisms, or have read them carelessly. In his entire critical incumbency, Shaw never expressed an opinion that was not fully concurred in by the great majority of his public. The only difference between Winter and Shaw—the only essential difference; that is—is that Winter became famous by expressing the mob opinion in terms of the mob, and that Shaw became famous by expressing the mob opinion in terms of the few. But, at bottom, the opinions of both were and are the opinions of the multitude.

If Winter was absurdly full of such adjectives as “detestable” and “indecent” when a Pinero sex play crossed his eye, so was Shaw—as you may find for yourself by turning, for example, to his “Dramatic Opinions and Essays,” Vol. I, page 44. If Winter was enchanted by mere empty mob mush, so too was Shaw—as you may find for yourself by turning, for example, to his Vol. I, page 70. And if Winter believed that morals were a part of art, so also did Shaw—as you may find for yourself by turning, for example, to his Vol. II, page 449. The technique and aesthetic of Winter, in the exposition of these typical mob attitudes, were the technique and aesthetic of Dr. Parkhurst; the technique and aesthetic of Shaw, in the exposition of what were intrinsically the same mob attitudes,

were the technique and aesthetic of Gaby Deslys. But, sharp showmen both, their materials, however diametrically opposed the manner of their merchandising, were fundamentally the same, and fundamentally of like mob echo quality.

In short, the surest way for a dramatic critic to remain in oblivion is to do exactly that which the theorists prescribe to the contrary, viz., contradict the opinions of the majority. Some excellent critics, fellows of sound sense and searching theatrical philosophy, have died thus the death of public inattention. Who of you, for example, has ever heard of Dr. Louis Allard, sometime of Harvard College, of E. Fordham-Spence of *The Westminster Gazette*, of Judge Parry and his "Judgments in Vacation," of acute Theodore Lessing, of C. E. Vaughan, Gustav Rickelt, Maximilian Harden as Ibsen critic, Joscha Savitz, or D. E. Oliver?

### § 3

*Destructive Criticism.*—Of the numerous and fecund fallacies concerned with criticism, doubtless the most unremittingly *enceinte* is that which holds it a vastly more easy business to blame than to praise. "Any fool can find fault" has been the

cornerstone of protestant retaliation to so-called destructive criticism for something over two centuries. Upon it have been reared the most sardonic animadversions of the Balzacs, Landors, Coleridges, Shelleys, Addisons, Lambs, Drydens and Disraelis, the very acuteness and hence longevity of whose destructive criticism of destructive criticism might possibly suggest to the more wagish logician that the exceptionally gifted disparagers in point—by proving both what they set out to prove and, automatically, the reverse—swung the punitive cowhide so far around their heads that it nipped their own ears.

That any fool can find fault is, of course, perfectly true. But that any fool can find fault accurately, soundly and searchingly is a horse of another colour. So to find fault calls upon and commands a decidedly uncommon talent. And so, above this, to find fault with such a fault finder calls upon and commands—as the history of destructive criticism emphatically proves—a downright genius. Any picturesque but empty dodo like the late Nat Goodwin can toss off a four-pound five-dollar book finding fault with everything from the criticism of Dr. Johnson to Edna Goodrich's mother, but it takes the talent of a William Archer to find searching fault even with a

## DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM 15

single one of Brunetière's dramatic theories, and the genius of a Bernard Shaw to find sound fault with what seemed to be the searching fault which William Archer found.

The extraordinarily capric quality of the mass of journalistic criticism in America is due, not as is generally maintained, to the desire of its writers to please by indiscriminate praise, but to the utter incapacity on the part of these writers to dispraise. In the theatrical criticism that appears in the native morning newspapers, the omnipresent note of eulogy is attributable less to the commentator's wish to eulogize than to the recognized fact that, given less than an hour in which to confect an estimate of a play, gush is immensely more simple of negotiation than diatribe. Every critical writer knows well the truth of this. When he is lazy, he writes praise; only when his mind is alert and eager does he feel himself capable of fault finding. The art of the careful, honest and demolishing *coup de grâce* is an art calling, firstly, for an exhaustive knowledge of the subject under the microscope, secondly, for an original and sharply inventive analytical turn of mind, and thirdly, for a wit and power over words that shall make them whiz through the printed page. The art of the equally careful and honest hip-hooray, even at its highest,

on the other hand calls upon at least the first two of these attributes in considerably less degree.

That the art of penetrating fault finding—or “destructive criticism,” as the jay misnomer has it—is a grant denied the considerable majority of our journalistic luminaries may be clearly discerned not only in the lavish bravos and vivas already mentioned as constituting the bulk of the daily reviews, but—better still—in the retrospective and more carefully pondered weekly reviews of reviews published in the Sunday editions. In these latter reviews one regularly observes a brave effort at qualification of the morning-after doxologies and joss-burnings, a sincere and upright attempt to expose holes. But what the sum? Generally little more than a faint barking of amiable dachshunds suddenly disguised as ferocious bloodhounds—with Eliza already twenty miles away. The notion that this daily journalistic criticism is dishonest—a theory cherished by most playwrights who compose dramas in which the heroine, when the detective’s back is turned, cleverly substitutes a railroad time-table for the warrant for her lover’s arrest, and by most actors whose eyes have been alleged by the critic for the *Mercure de Hoboken* to be not quite so dreamy as Chauncey Olcott’s, or Louis Mann’s—this notion is absurd. The

## DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM 17

American journalistic criticism, whether morning or evening, is, save in a few notorious instances, not dishonest; it is, save in a few equally notorious instances, merely disqualified. It is disqualified because it honestly essays, when the occasion honestly presents itself, to write razor-keen destructive criticism and finds itself, because of the supreme difficulty of the job and its own dialectical shortcomings, sorely confounded. Its toe, eager, well-aimed and valiant, is poised trembling abaft the breeches, yet condemned by inhibitory tendons to lift gingerly and rest content merely to flick a bit of lint off the coat-tail.

Consider, for example, such a paper as the present New York *Globe*. The perspirations of this gazette to compose incisive destructive criticism when the occasion demands are typical of the perspirations of at least three quarters of our American newspapers. And the result of these perspirations is destructive criticism that may be described as being approximately as destructive as the eruption of a Kiralfy card-board volcano. Even simple fault finding, fault finding that more or less accurately finds the fault, evades such journalistic enterprise. In concrete instance whereof, take some such review as this, culled from the columns of the journal named:



“‘A Sleepless Night’ is a farce comedy of the familiar Long Island bedroom type, but it achieves something farce is not supposed to achieve. Jack Larric and Gustav Blum, who are responsible for the night of insomnia, have managed to write much that is satirical into their farce comedy, and that is inimical to the piece. Folks that go to see farces don’t want to giggle; they want to laugh out loud, and blush.” Etc., etc.

Here, indubitably, was a perfectly honest attempt to write honest destructive criticism that was honestly merited. But observe the result. The exhibit in point failed to provoke laughter and, since laughter is the chief end necessarily sought by such an exhibit, failed of effect. The commentator appreciated this typically and accurately enough, yet when he tried to get at the reason for the failure—when he essayed even the simple business of getting whatever thoughts he had about the case onto paper—he became as one utterly bewildered and began metaphorically to chase himself ’round in circles. Thus, while in his very first sentence he says that the piece is a farce comedy, he finds fault with the farce comedy because the farce comedy achieves something that *farce* is not supposed to achieve. Which, obviously, is not far removed from criticizing “A Wife Without a Smile” because it achieves something that

## DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM 19

"Charley's Aunt" is not supposed to achieve. Granting even that the Olympiodorus in point had not here become somewhat twisted, what is the "something" which one observes him astutely figuring out as being inimical and alien to farce? One observes him astutely figuring that satire is inimical and alien to farce, thus sagaciously proving to the doubtless vastly embarrassed Shaw that his "Androcles" is a gloomy and ill-advised hybrid, and that such Continental satirical farces as "The Fat Cæsar," "Donatello" and the like are mournful affairs.

The fault finding which the gentleman now and eventually negotiates, to wit, that the particular farce with which he is concerned was not laughable because while satire may make "folks" giggle, it cannot make these "folks" laugh or blush, shows even more clearly the blind and vain critical groping for the play's actual fault. That satire cannot make persons laugh aloud (as, for example, in the demonstrated case, among a hundred or more others, of de Caillavet's and de Flers' "The King") or blush (as, for example, in the mayhap demonstrated case, among a hundred or more others, of the unexpurgated satirical farce on the French petty bureaucrat, "La Présidente") is indeed by way of being high news.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that appreciating the difficulty of achieving anything approaching destructive criticism, or even remotely sound fault finding, the majority of newspapers very frankly heave a sigh, throw up the sponge and cover their confusion by the simple expedient of shooting off very easily contrived volleys of Pollyanna oil? To be fair to the *Globe* reviewer, one must at least praise him for his effort to do the right thing, for his hard sweating to get at the faults of the play he was engaged to appraise, for his attempt, however ill-fated, to brew an appropriately destructive criticism. But for one Dred Scott who succeeds even in getting so far with destructive criticism as this *Globe* Dred Scott has more or less brilliantly succeeded, one finds a multitude of *Evening Telegram* cupids who correctly appreciate the labyrinthine embarrassments of the job and genially pass them up with such facile constructive slow music as

“Mr. Glendinning’s attempts to extricate himself from his sad predicament, into which he fell guiltlessly, thus seeming to bear out the contention that it is only the innocent who get caught, were screamingly funny, as explanations usually are to unfeeling auditors. It could not be otherwise. Any youth put under the necessity of clearing up the mystery and doubt aroused by the

## DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM 21

discovery of one pink-pajamed beauty under the bed-clothes in his apartment, would be funny just because of the foolishness of the idea that it could be done. But two! Oh yes, the other one wasn't in pajamas. No, she sort of wrapped herself in a flowered kimono and looked self-conscious. As one of the other characters delivered the line, 'two was much too much.'

"'A Sleepless Night' was written by Jack Larric and Gustav Blum. The dialogue is clever and there are times when it approaches the brilliant. There is a rapid-fire effect to it that helps in holding interest and bridges the gaps where the action lags a little. It also possesses the virtue of not appearing to have been written merely for the effect of being smart. The spoken words are all germane to the story. The play is ideally cast. The various actors did their rôles to perfection. The production was staged under the capable direction of Oscar Eagle."

These assiduously sweet fellows who look invariably upon the theatre as a June bride looks at a lily-bud are, however, comparatively not always so droll as they would seem. After all, the species of reviewing which they espouse is not a whit less trumpery than that practised by the equally assiduous journalistic Eumenides who would seem to look not infrequently upon the theatre (save when it concerns itself with the works of Percy Mackaye and other representatives of the

eighteenth century) as a ravenous bus boy looks upon the free lunch. The mock destructive criticism of this latter school is fully as jocund as the mock constructive criticism of the former. As an example, take on this particular occasion a single slice from the critical opus in the *Evening Post* anent the same farce, "A Sleepless Night." After a very fierce and savage preliminary charge upon the absurdly trivial little dingus with tanks, ten-ton pile drivers, iron shillelahs, large-bore cannon, dum-dum spears, howitzers and assafoetida bombs, this mortal pot-shot:

"The story which it endeavors to tell is too silly and preposterous to come within even the elastic limits of farce."

This, the *Post* Garcilasso Vega's carefully calculated climacteric fetch. But the story, alas, happens to be fundamentally much the same story as that of Mr. William Hurlbut's comedy, "Saturday to Monday," which, upon its presentation by Winthrop Ames in this very theatre the season before, was—unless I am very greatly in error—highly praised as interesting and reasonable by this same forgetful commentator.

But to argue in defense and explanation of destructive criticism as a high form of art that its

absence from the columns of our newspapers is often chiefly predicated on want of leisure wherein carefully to weigh, ponder and reflect, and wherein to interpret the findings pointedly and with skill and cunning, is plainly as droll as arguing that genius is merely a capacity for taking infinite time. The question is not one of lacking leisure, but one of lacking expertness. Turning from the newspapers to the American periodicals and books of dramatic criticism—all granted time and to spare for studious reflection—one encounters, with very few exceptions, a similar disability in the art of sound fault finding. Apparently appreciating, as the newspaper commentators appreciate, that sharp destructive criticism is a rooster too difficult of winging, our critics of the drama for the more leisurely brochures take no chances, but sedulously devote themselves to an attempted concealment of their shortcomings in enthusiastic articles on such impressive and safe yokel-magnets as community theatres, Maeterlinck, the *esprit* of Yvette Guilbert, and the value of repertory companies. That these enthusiasms are often grounded infinitely less upon calm observation and sound deduction than upon an unacquaintance with the topic in hand so great that it makes fault finding—or so-called destructive criticism—out of the question, is fairly ob-

vious to any one who casts an eye at these bland uplift professors and their essays. Take, for example, Mr. Clayton Hamilton, critic to *Vogue*. And take, for example, his recent amorous critique of Henri Lavedan, a few illuminating passages from which I herewith make bold to quote:

"Throughout the last three decades, Henri Lavedan of the French Academy has been recognized as one of the foremost representatives of contemporary French dramatic authorship; and, though his work is intimately national, he has enjoyed a quite unusual success in the commercial theatre of this country. The first of his plays to be presented in America was 'Catherine,' which was produced by Annie Russell in 1898. Otis Skinner produced 'The Duel' in 1906, and 'Sire' in 1911. In 1918, Mrs. Fiske presented 'Service'; and the latest item on the list, 'The Marquis de Priola,' has recently been added by Leo Ditrichstein. Of these five plays, three have run for not less than an entire season in this country, and the others have been played for many weeks. What is the reason for this remarkable success of M. Lavedan with a theatre-going public that rejects so many European dramatists of even larger reputation on the ground that they are 'foreign,' and therefore not immediately comprehensible?

"The reason is that Henri Lavedan is to be admired mainly as a painter of portraits. . . . The American public is, no doubt, unconsciously attracted by the fact that M. Lavedan is more sincerely and emphatically

## DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM 25

moral in his work than any other of his French contemporaries, with the single exception of Eugène Brieux. . . . His method is similar to that of one of the most honourable authors of our recent English drama; and it would not be at all beside the mark to describe M. Lavedan as the French equivalent of Henry Arthur Jones." Etc., etc.

What have we here, gentlemen? We have—if you will forgive me the insuavity—flapdoodle. For what we read is something that should rightly have been destructive criticism but that has been instead shrewdly palmed off on the layman as "constructive" by a critic slick enough to understand that there is nothing like extravagant praise to cover and hide inaccuracies. Examining the Hamilton composition even casually, one finds it a mass of gushing inexactness progressing with a gay, jazzy crescendo to a sweet-sour whack on the cow-bell.

By no first-rate critic in or out of France has Lavedan ever been recognized as of the company of Rostand, de Curel, Hervieu, Donnay, Lemaître—or even de Caillavet and de Flers. He belongs rather, as every first-rate critic without exception has agreed, to the second group containing such names as Bernstein and Bataille. (We will omit Brieux and Porto-Riche—and even Capus—for



whatever one's personal regard for their eminence, their positions have been open to debate—and let us be fair to the *Vogue* philosopher.) Thus, to say that Lavedan is one of the foremost representatives of contemporary French dramatic authorship is relatively as exact as to say that Ludwig Fulda (though a very talented man) is one of the foremost representatives of contemporary German dramatic authorship. Furthermore, Lavedan's plays, contrary to Mr. Hamilton, have—with a single exception—not only *not* “enjoyed a quite unusual success in the commercial theatre of this country” but—as Mr. Hamilton may learn if he will engage the records of the late Charles Frohman—have lost a fine pot of money. And the single exception, “Catherine,” will be found from the same easily accessible records to have achieved a comparative success less on its own merits than by virtue of the excellent showmanship and sentimental hokum slyly practised in the casting of the play—a hokum whose adroit press-agenting will be unfolded to the *Vogue* commentator by any theatrical manager of the day. But the reliability of our impulsive critic is even more simply to be plumbed in his record that “The Marquis de Priola” “has been played for many weeks.” Whatever the prosperity of its future, the fact re-

mains that when Hamilton wrote this, "The Marquis de Priola" had been playing exactly *two* weeks.

Let us go on. We now find Hamilton contending that this quite unusual commercial success (sic) of Lavedan is due (1) to his ability as a painter of portraits, and (2) to his moral accent. Yet "Catherine," Lavedan's one American money-maker, will be admitted even by Hamilton himself to contain one of his very weakest portraits, not only not in any degree to be compared with the portraits painted by him in the instances of "Le Prince d'Aurec" and "Le Nouveau Jeu," but—more—not to be compared even with those exhibited by him in his commercial failures, "Le Duel" and "Sire"—and possibly "Servir." Again, to argue that "the American public is no doubt unconsciously attracted (and here, again, sic) by the fact that M. Lavedan is more sincerely and emphatically moral in his work than any other of his French contemporaries, with the single exception of Eugène Brieux" is (1) evidently to have contrived to read an esoteric lewdness into such a contemporary as Rostand, for instance, and (2) to believe that the American public was no doubt unconsciously attracted to so many enormously lucrative French plays of "The Girl from Rector's" order because of their sincere and emphatic Sun-

day School aspect. . . . The whimsey of the Henry Arthur Jones comparison, after the preliminary ecstatic cornet solo and cheek-kissing, I need scarcely expand upon.

#### § 4

*The New Scenery.*—The theory of the so-called New Scenery falls to pieces once one takes a sharp eye to it. The sponsors of the neo-cheesecloth movement maintain that the best way to fix the attention of the audience upon the play itself is to subordinate the scenery, and that the best way, in turn, to subordinate the scenery is to simplify it to the furthest degree compatible with beauty. The fallacy lies in believing that stark simplicity may not be quite as distracting as overburdened elaboration. Compare the effect upon the attention of a bleak, empty stretch of gray sea and the same stretch of sea dotted with myriad gulls and ships of all descriptions. Which diverts one hypnotically the more; which the more greatly cultivates insensibility and inattention to whatever is passing before one in one's immediate environment?

## § 5

*The Matter of Adaptation.*—Despite the not uncommon assumption that approximately all that is necessary to the adaptation of the Continental play is to set the second-act clock back six hours, take out the bedstead and cast Mr. John Barrymore for the husband instead of the lover, it is reversely true that this business of adaptation calls for the very highest playwriting sagacity and talent. And it is equally true, by reason of this, that not more than one such adaptation in every twenty-five is worth a hoot; and true, further, that what holds of American-made adaptations holds equally of the attempts at adaptation made by the English, the Germans, the Austrians, and the French.

It is, with reservations, almost as difficult to translate a play from one language into another, and from the viewpoint of one people into that of another, and from the favour of one nation into the prejudice of another nation, as it is to write the play in the first place. A careful scrutiny of the statistics of the world's theatre for the last ten years discovers astonishingly few adaptations that, whether from the artistic or even the commercial orthodoxy, have been fully successful. And the figures seem all the more surprising when one ob-

serves the very large proportion of failure in the matter of the adaptation of plays which even in their original form would appear to have been automatically pre-adapted, and easily to have been made ready for an alien audience by a mere scratch or two of the pen. As, for example, Margaret Mayo's "Baby Mine," intrinsically a farce to the French taste, which even the adroit Maurice Hennequin fozzled in French adaptation—and, for further example, Eugene Walter's "Paid in Full," intrinsically a comedy-drama to the German taste, (*vide* Rudolf Lothar's "I Love You"), which even the equally adroit Schmieden funk'd in German adaptation.

There is surely something more than mere theatre chance behind the fact that ten more or less celebrated Continental plays failed in quick succession in their adapted form when brought to the American stage, several years ago, by the late Charles Frohman. For all Mr. Belasco's exceptional astuteness as a showman, the "Fable of the Wolf" ("The Phantom Rival") and "The Lily" baffled his most shrewdly selected translators. In France, Synge's "Playboy" (adapted by Maurice Bourgeois for the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in the Antoine), Wedekind's "Awakening of Spring" (adapted by Robert d'Humières), Moody's "Great

Divide" (adapted by the Cazamians), Pinero's "House in Order" (adapted by Bazalgette and Bienstock), to say nothing of Shaw's "You Never Can Tell" and "Mrs. Warren," Hebbel's "Marie Madeleine," José Godina's "In the Gardens of Murcie," and scores of other such interesting plays have regularly gone astray. In Germany and Austria, this has been equally true in the case of innumerable plays like Gorki's "The Last," Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows," Stephen Phillips' "Paola and Francesca," C. M. S. MacLellan's "Leah Kleschna," Pinero's "House in Order," Shaw's "Androcles," and Haddon Chambers' "Passers-By." And true, as well, has the situation been in England with a vast number of plays by the better known among alien dramatists—plays such as "The Happy Island" (adapted by James Bernard Fagan from Lengyel), "The Right to Kill" (adapted by Gilbert Canman from Pierre Frondaie), "The Turning Point" (adapted by Peter le Marchant from Kistemaekers), "The Bread of Others" (by J. N. Duddington from Turgenev), "The Head of the Firm" (by Leslie Faber from Bergström)—the plays, beyond and above these, of Hauptmann, Schnitzler, Guimèra, Molnar, Guitry, Björnson, Sudermann, Di Giacomo, Strindberg, et al.

When an adapted play fails, whether in this country or in England or on the Continent, it is the habitual critical pastime to lay blame for the demise not upon the adaptation, but upon the original play: the blame usually taking flower in the theory that the theme and development of the original are alien to the philosophy, taste and whim of the national audience immediately concerned. In the majority of cases, this is, of course, a mere braying and wiggling of ears. When a respectable piece of dramatic writing fails in adaptation, the philosophy, taste and whim of the alien audience are often less at fault than the philosophy, taste and whim of the adaptor. For example, the failure in America of the Hungarian Imre Földes' "Hallo," adapted by Mr. George Broadhurst as "Over the 'Phone," and without exception laid by the critics to the difference in moral attitude on the part of Viennese and American audiences, was actually due not to the difference in moral attitude on the part of Viennese and American audiences, but to the difference in moral attitude on the part of the original author of the play and the adaptor. How in God's name the difference in sexual moral attitude 'twixt the European and American audiences could be brought forward as an argument to account for the local failure of the play

when the adaptor by deleting the adultery motif and substituting therefor a kiss motif had completely removed any preliminary ground for this difference in sex moral attitude, is pretty hard to understand. The failure of the play was due, not to the fact that an American audience is unsympathetic to gay adultery, but, very simply, to the fact that the adaptor believed an American audience was unsympathetic to gay adultery. The effect and the result were precisely the effect and the result that would automatically be achieved were "Peg o' My Heart" to be adapted for French audiences by, say, Pierre Veber and Maurice Rémon and were the MM. Veber and Rémon to think to enchant their Gallic public by deleting the artless innocence of the heroine and making her, instead, a *fille de joie*.

Apart from this adjudging the failure of adaptations in terms of the box-office, we observe an even more striking failure in terms of artistic and intelligent enterprise. Bernstein's "The Thief," for example, though it achieved a considerable commercial success in its American adaptation, was in this local reincarnation little more than a senseless yell *potage*. The entire meaning and intent of the play—the strychnia of lingerie, to wit—was slashed out of the text by the adaptor, with the



result that what remained was nothing but a tencent detective story culminating in a noisy Bertha M. Clay love scene.

If Mr. Granville Barker were entrusted with the job of bringing Albrecht Dürer's painting of the "Adoration of the Trinity" to London from Vienna, it is reasonable to suppose that he would exercise the greatest care in transit to see that no nicks got into it. But when Mr. Granville Barker is entrusted with the job of bringing Arthur Schnitzler's word painting of "Anatol" to London from Vienna, what does he do? He does exactly what nine-tenths of the adaptors do when a work of art is given into their care. He nicks it up with his own petty morals and petty prejudices until little more remains of the original than the frame. Thus also does an American adaptor like Mr. Leo Ditrichstein—even though he is one of the best—slash to pieces Molnar's "Fable of the Wolf," does an English adaptor like Mr. Cosmo Gordon Lennox slaughter de Caillavet's and de Flers' "L'Ane de Buridan" to make a Frohman holiday and one like Mr. Arthur Bouchier mutilate Lavedan's "Duel" beyond recognition, do French adaptors like the MM. Germain and Trébor scuttle the German Robert Reiner's "War" and a German adaptor

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like Rudolf Presber the French Hennequin's and Bilhaud's "Best of Wives."

The trouble with the majority of adaptors, wherever one finds them, is a very simple trouble: they imagine that adaptation consists primarily in adapting an alien play to the different taste of a local audience, where, in reality, adaptation should consist rather in adapting the different taste of a local audience to the alien play.

Take, for instance, a French farce-comedy like "Le Rubicon." To adapt this diverting play in such wise that it would not colour the cheek of an Anglo-Saxon audience would be utterly to ruin it. There would be nothing left of it—and it would unquestionably fail with the first or second performance. But to adapt the Anglo-Saxon audience to "Le Rubicon" by some such device, say, as having a squad of supers in policemen's uniforms rush down the aisle at the final curtain and, after a denunciatory speech by the jackass captain, pretend to raid the theatre on the ground that the play was immoral and not fit for an Anglo-Saxon audience, would be to preserve the play and probably pack the streets with ticket-boosting Blumbergs, Rosenblatts and Cohens. By such a process, the prejudice of a local audience might be simply

adapted to the alien play—and all ends aptly served. For what we thus should have would be, obviously, the audience brought into impact with the play rather than, as is general, the play brought into impact with the audience. What such an alien audience demands is not, as the adaptors seem to think, that the characters in the play shall not condone things which to the alien audience are base and immoral, but, to the contrary, that *it* (the alien audience) shall not condone or seem to condone those things. This is the point the adaptor more often than not confuses, or overlooks entirely.

### § 6

*Skating on Thin Ice.*—One of the droll delusions of our American dramatic critics is that the French farce writer is without a peer in the form of exercise known as skating on thin ice. The truth of the matter, of course, is that it is not the French farce writer that is without a peer in the enterprise, but rather the French language. And particularly the French language in the department of its daring phrase, simile and metaphor. Skating on thin ice requires no mental nor inventive dexterity or balance when the medium of expression is already automatically suited to the manoeuvre.

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And yet, even with this immense advantage, the French farce writer often reveals himself a clumsy fellow in the handling of delicate situations. The American Hopwood, working in a stiff and flinty language, has nonetheless skated over thin ice more gracefully than such French farceurs as Verneuil, de Bassan, Gandera, Hennequin, Mars, Basset, Leon Xanrof, Jean Martet, and the jocose Giafféri and Jean d'Aguzan. Bracco, the Italian, has at his best glided over thin ice more adroitly than Feydeau, the excellent Frenchman, at *his* best. Schnitzler and Bahr, the Austrians, working in one of the baldest of languages, have equalled, if not actually excelled, the best modern French skaters at their own game. And even such inferior craftsmen as the German Lothar Schmidt, in a language balder still, since unlike the Viennese it is untouched by French breezes, have in such pieces as "Only a Dream" turned the trick with a high prettiness. To any one acquainted with the ready-made subtleties of colloquial French, the enormous initial advantage enjoyed by the French writer over the writers in other languages must be apparent. Let an American like Hopwood write in French and a Frenchman like Coolus write in English, and we should soon enough see which was the more expert skater.

## § 7

*The Actor-Manager.*—The career of the actor-manager in the English-speaking theatre has become so largely a matter of stencil that it may, almost without exception, be safely predicted in terms of three stages. The first stage finds the actor-manager—at fifty still vastly intrigued by his personal beauty—given to presenting himself in sentimental drawing-room comedies wherein, by virtue of an elegant morning coat and a gift for polite repartee, he succeeds magnificently in winning the affections of the lovely ingénue from the juvenile. The second stage finds him—nearing sixty and now reluctantly intrigued somewhat less by his manly beauty than by his cosmic eminence—given to presenting himself in biographical plays wherein, by virtue of an illustrious historical name, a gray wig, a red plush suit, and alternately witty and heroic sentiments culled from the mouth of the dramatized deceased, he succeeds in winning for himself at second-hand all the plaudits withheld from the poor dead genius in his lifetime. And the third stage finds him—beyond sixty and fat, and hence perforce brought to abjure his mirror and think of himself primarily as an actor—

given, with but minor excursions for old times' sake, to Shakespeare.

## § 8

*On Observation.*—What passes for sharp observation on the part of even the best of our comic playwrights is actually most often a mere apprehension of some trivial and entirely negligible phenomenon the novelty of which the critics mistake for genuine percipience. Thus, were I, turned showmaker, to remark in a play that it always looks like rain through a screen, or that the most uncomfortable thing in the world is trying to eat dinner without a napkin, or that there is always something that sounds drunk about a hansom cab late at night, or that there are probably not two persons in the whole United States who know Little Eva's last name—I should be swallowed as a playwright with a more or less acute eye to the idiosyncrasies of the world. Of such perfectly simple things—a dozen of which occur to the veriest blockhead every hour—is the so-called "observation" of our playmakers composed. Thus, Mr. Avery Hopwood, probably the best writer of farce we possess, has achieved, in all his

farces from beginning to end, little more authentic observation of, and comment on, contemporary life, persons, institutions and manners than is contained in his "Fair and Warmer" line to the effect that however late one gets to "Siegfried" there is always one more act. Thus, Miss Margaret Mayo, in all her otherwise capable work, from first to last has vouchsafed an eye that has observed little save that a fire at night seems always to be just around the corner. All the farce writers we have—and we have some good ones—have in all their farces combined presented less genuine sharp observation of life and less genuine sharp criticism of that life than is contained in a single newspaper cartoon of John T. McCutcheon, W. E. Hill or H. T. Webster.

## § 9

*Maeterlinck as Dramatist.*—The pretensions of Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian, Madame Blavatsky, long since brilliantly stripped in the discerning essay of André Tridon, once more brazenly unveil themselves in the sequel to "The Blue Bird" and pirouette before the jury in all their droll nudity. This sequel, called "The Betrothal," is, like its stem-play, intrinsically little more than a George V. Hobart or Walter Browne Broadway

morality show—much more suavely and restrainedly written, true enough, yet still of a but slightly higher level in the way of genuine imagination, philosophy, beauty, or sound art. It vouchsafes the same immature vagueness (promiscuously mistaken for mysticism), the same gaunt literalness (likewise confounded with designed simplicity), and the same dialectic diabetes (similarly confused with sweetness of viewpoint) that its predecessor vouchsafed. And it convinces all who in such appraisals are not given to mistaking beautiful scenery for beautiful drama that its creator is the most greatly overestimated dramatic writer of our place and time.

Dealing with the adventures of the adolescent Tytyl incidental to his search for an appropriate mate, "The Betrothal," like "The Blue Bird," leaves in one the feeling that something is missing when at the fall of the final curtain one isn't invited downstairs for strawberries and cake. The air of a Sunday School entertainment—albeit a very proficient one—is difficult to get rid of. For Maeterlinck is the *de luxe* Sunday School superintendent of the modern drama: an amalgam of an European John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Charles Rann Kennedy, with one of his eyes fastened piously upon the Aldobrandini Madonna and



Sacré Coeur and the other rolling slyly at the Mlle. Arlette Dorgère and the Bouffes Parisiens. He has written phrases and passages of sheer and compelling beauty into the bulk of his work, but—with minor exception hereinafter to be noted—he has not to this day in that entire work written a single thing that has had a single thought in it, or a single wonder, or a single dream, much above the pitch of his own Tyltyl's metaphysic. Beside even J. M. Barrie, and the imagination and fancy of Barrie, he is mere advanced vaudeville: a literate song and dance man vainly endeavouring to clog to Mozart's G Minor symphony.

The true artist is ever a true critic of his own work. Somewhere in his heart there is a bit of a critical snicker, a trace of a smile at himself. In the heart of Maeterlinck, as that heart is revealed to us, there is only a silk badge and a high hat. Where a Barrie, say, in a "Peter Pan"—which Maeterlinck at his best has not approached—winkingly trots out a tot of two to claim the play as her own, the Belgian Mrs. Rasputin sets out his "Betrothal" (a fuddled effort at a kind of "Peter Pan") with all the deadly soberness of a Methodist picnic. The body of this "Betrothal" is related in terms of the dream dreamt by Tyltyl and the amateurish content and literality of the writ-

ing might thus be attributed—as in the instance of “Peter Pan”—to the deliberate and eminently appropriate attack of the dramatist. But never for an instant can one believe this in the case of Maeterlinck. The amateurish content and literality of the dreamless coda to “The Blue Bird” and omega to this sequel have taught one too much for that. The amateurish content and the literality of the writing of “The Betrothal” are not the result of deliberation and relevant treatment; they are the result, purely and simply, of an amateurish and become sterile mind. Tytyl awake in “The Betrothal” and Tytyl a-dream in “The Blue Bird” are the same, and their adventurings are the same, and the philosophies and imaginations that motivate them are the same. And all are barren, puny, third-rate. The symbolism of a Destiny that shrinks to nothingness as life’s affairs, by the very theme of the play, abide by the decisions of this same Destiny—the magic cap that sees into the soul of a fanatical miser and discerns in that soul a great prodigality and charity—the philosophy that the true worth and profundity of a man’s love for a woman is conditioned on the approval of the children that are to be born to them—of such impenetrable bosh and quack sentimentality is such a Maeterlinck work as this “Betrothal” all compact.

The truth about this Flemish Ekdal *père* is that, aside from his three little one-act plays, "L'Intruse," "Intérieur" and "Les Aveugles," he has written nothing for the stage that might contribute legitimacy to the exalted estate in critical and artistic favour to which he has attained. And these little plays—the two best, in particular—were the fruit of his earlier dramatic years. Founding the theory of the symbolist drama, he was to reveal himself incapable of the strength to build higher upon the cornerstone; and the progressing years have disclosed him more and more in the light of a half-squiffy and extraordinarily moony female Joseph Conrad wildly tossed about and regularly ship-wrecked on the allegorical high seas. The Maeterlinck of 1902 and on, the Maeterlinck of "Monna Vanna" and "Maria Magdalène," of "The Blue Bird" and "The Betrothal," the Maeterlinck of Sunday supplement uplift sermons on the lovely life after sweet death, the Maeterlinck wistfully smelling at a rosebud while being interviewed in his ruined castle, the Maeterlinck photographed atop a hill at sunset looking out to sea like a moving picture fade-out, the Maeterlinck of the carefully mussed gray hair and the sad Marie Doro look carefully cultivated in his eyes—this is the soul of the true Maeterlinck, the true soul

of the Belgian Belasco, the mark of an artist who started forth nobly and not without splendour on the highway of literature and, finding the road long and winding and full of rocks, calmly sat himself down and decided to make easy and comfortable winks at the box office, at Mr. Hearst's opulent pocketbook, and at Dodd, Mead and Company.

Maeterlinck's neo-romanticist fame, when closely analyzed, is found to have been the result of a critical confusion of dramaturgic novelty with artistic integrity. On the higher plane, Maeterlinck profited by the delusion much the same as did, on the lower, the author of the tin-pot "On Trial." His valiant attempt to disengage art from the details of actuality, as the phrase has it, has succeeded in the main only in disengaging himself from the details of art. If he has divorced himself from the details of actuality, he has made the actual moonlight of the world into a mere spotlight stage moonlight, and the actual mysterious stars of the heavens into so many mere miniature incandescent bulbs. He is not a voice in the wilderness; he is a wilderness in the voice. Words, words, words—many of them singing and lovely—but still mere words, words, words. If he knows the effects he desires to create, his skill is insuffi-

cient to permit him to obtain them. His rains impress one as falling from shower-baths, and one detects the stagehand hiding between his printed lines and obligingly shaking the sheet of tin and rolling the peas 'round the drum-head to create his storms. He is, as most always he has been, a poet sitting bravely and rather splendidly astride the wooden horse on a merry-go-round, riding in blind and dogged confidence to a destination in the next block. He is Beethoven on a mandolin; Rosetti in *passe-partout*.

Not long ago, there appeared in one of the magazines a little sketch called "The Master Mind."

"The ghostly darkness of the room"—it went—"served to heighten the effect of the séance. A sense of weirdness pervaded everything. The pale, calm face of the medium contrasted with the awe-struck countenances of the spectators as the table rose in the air. Diabolism, mysticism, reigned supreme. Only one face, boredly indifferent, seemed out of place. It belonged to the gentleman who manipulated the piano wire."

Here, unintentionally, is the best impressionistic criticism of Maeterlinck and the drama of Maeterlinck and the audiences before that drama that I have had the fortune to come across.

Taking Maeterlinck's dramatic writing from first

to last, I cannot resist the conviction that it is, with the obvious exception of "Monna Vanna" and possibly "Maria Magdalène," the essay form gone wrong. The poetic essay, that is. "The delicacy of technic displayed," wrote the excellent Huneker of his "Aglavaine and Sélysette" back in the drinking days, "is almost inconceivable." One is tempted rather to say almost invisible. For "Aglavaine and Sélysette" is poetry of a sort run, as the printers say, solid. There is no more dramatic technic discernible in its manoeuvring than there is in the "Anatomy of Melancholy." The impression it leaves in the playhouse is of a stained glass window—considerably cracked—misplaced in the wall of the late George Edwardes' Gaiety; of a girls' choir tackling Moussorgsky.

In the critical school that detects in Maeterlinck a divine fire which sees "the star in the grain of wheat," I find myself, alas, wearing the dunce's cap and sitting on a high chair in the same corner with the Ashley Dukes who observes of Maeterlinck's advent: "This was the destined hour of the magician, and Maeterlinck appeared. The apparition was startling, and some critics, seeking a pompous imbecility to cover their confusion, named him 'the Belgian Shakespeare.' In this fashion Tchekhov might be named 'the Russian

Ibsen,' or Hugo von Hofmannsthal 'the Austrian Dante.' Such is the disintegrating force of the new idea upon the mind of the expert labeller."

The technic of Maeterlinck in his vain attempt to articulate the subconscious mood through suggestion and symbolic speech—an attempt generally confused by his admirers with an accomplishment—is at bottom the technic of the Futurists and other such current liberally spoofed art cults. Yet the same critics who get up steam over the theories and technic of Maeterlinck gallop to finger the nose at the theories and technic of the Futurists. Maeterlinck, in this general enterprise, amiably recalls Mr. Strunsky's Puh, the Hindu Omega:

"Puh is," we are told, "ultimate. But he is far more than the last word. He has banished the last word. Puh is the writer who writes without words. He has magnificently swept away the narrow conventions of word-forms, outworn and outgrown traditions. His thoughts are universal, not subject to time and space, needing no elaborately false temporal mediums for making them known. In fine, Puhism is the science of awakening thought by suggestion.

*"Flith! F-L-i-t-h!* Don't you immediately hear in those two magic words the concentrated autumn wind sweeping truculently through the brown woods and the sad scraping of raw limbs against each other? Don't you see the gaunt tree-trunks scrawling against the

clouds and the shivering rabbit whisking through the eddying leaves? Or does that picture fail to chime in with your mood? Ah! Puh is adaptable. *Fliih! F-l-i-t-h!* Hear now a gentle breeze sighing sentimentally across the iris-beds along the river and one pee-wee calling to another in the top of the nearest willow; see the warm sunlight making patterns along the hills and flicking the wave-tops with silver.

"Puhism is nothing more than the adaptation of literature to the personality of the reader. Besides saving paper, the author never disagreeably accentuates himself, and each reader is left with his chance mood undirected and virginally pure. To each his own reaction to Life. What more can we ask of an author than that he provide his readers with thoughts? And what more simple and natural than to supply them with their own thoughts?"

In the aim of the technic of Maeterlinck, the subconscious mood, previously expressed only in terms of music, found words. But in the aim alone. For "Pelléas" and "Ariane"—and even "Monna Vanna"—have for the expression of that mood deserted their step-parent and gone back to their real birthplace, the orchestra, and to their real fathers and mothers hiding in the throats of the operatic stage.

But if "The Betrothal" roughly strips the Maeterlinckian pretensions to what may be called the musicless music-drama, "The Burgomaster of



Stilemonde," his latest work for the stage, even more roughly tears the undeserved purple from the Maeterlinckian pretensions to an imagination, a passion and a vision powerful enough to act in the presence of real prose catastrophe. This last play is in the most liberal estimate merely second-rate Broadway "war" melodrama. The name and fame of its author, of course, have as usual taken criticism by the nose and there has been the customary attempt to ferret out absent virtues. Yet the work is without dramatic or literary distinction. Edward Sheldon, a Broadway playwright, could have written the play better than Maeterlinck has written it: not only from the point of view of actable drama but, I venture to say, from the point of view of literature. Had "The Burgomaster of Stilemonde" been signed with the name of some Max Marcin, for instance, it would have been jestingly charged with all the manifold imperfections which, since it has been signed with the name of the Belgian Amy Lowell, have been stereotypedly and solemnly accepted as cardinal excellences.

In conclusion, to repeat and sum up. Whatever Maeterlinck's debatable eminence in the world of letters, there can remain increasingly small doubt that in the world of drama his position—

save in the minor instances of the three one-act plays already referred to—has been absurdly overestimated. To this overestimate, various easily appraisable things have conduced. Literary critics, whose delusion that any short novel with the descriptions printed in italics, the dialogue indented and the names of the characters centered constitutes an actable play, have mistaken such of his typographically mis-set, if in this instance extremely praiseworthy, novels as “*Pelléas and Mélisande*” for effective theatre drama—when, presented as a play without the blood transfusion of music, the composition actually constitutes acting drama in the same degree that Fouillée’s psychological treatise, “*Tempéramente et Caractère*,” constitutes a novel. Further, the sedulously cultivated and craftily promulgated picturesqueness of the man himself and of his life have operated—very much as the same thing operated on a much smaller scale in the case of the late Richard Harding Davis—toward the confounding of values that habitually infects all the numerous impressible swallows of magnificent hocus-pocus. Again further, the first and largely unweighed (if at the time understandable) enthusiasms of such first-rate literary critics as Huneker contrived to affect and dazzle—as is the wont of literary criticism—much

of the subsequent dramatic criticism. And further still, the man himself struck almost at the outset of his career the extreme good fortune of falling in with, and being personally liked by, a noteworthy group of French boosters. This group literally "made" Maeterlinck in the same uncritical way that, on a lower level in the England of the moment, Swinnerton's and Merrick's close friends are doing their damndest to "make" them.

### § 10

*Intelligence and the Actor.*—To argue that all actors—or, at least, the great majority of actors—are numskulls and to prove it is of a piece with arguing, and proving, that all fat men—or, at least, the great majority of fat men—perspire. To find fault with an actor for being a numskull is to find fault with a philosopher for being intelligent. Numskullery is one of the essential attributes of the actor; without it, he is an incompetent in his profession, a fellow ill-equipped for his life's work, a soul doomed to ignominious failure. Imagine an intelligent man—a man like Lincoln or Gladstone, say—rouging his lips and cheeks, blackening his bald spot, beading his eyelashes, dressing himself up like the top of an old-fashioned mantel-

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piece and, thus arrayed, swelling proudly at the handclapping of a houseful of yokels when with a tin sword he stands at the top of a papier-maché stairway in a J. Stanley Weyman opus and, yelling "For the glory of La Belle France!" at the top of his lungs, chases three nervous college-boy supers back into the wings. . . .

What is often mistaken for intelligence in an actor is merely a talent for not reading incorrectly the work of the dramatist. But it actually requires no more authentic intrinsic intelligence to play, say, the King in Shakespeare's "Lear" than it requires to play the oboe in Beethoven's Op. 87. Application it does require, yes—and, with application, a good pair of lungs, a clear speaking voice, a copy of a pronouncing dictionary, a presence at least approximating that of Gimbel Brothers' chief floor-walker, and a measure of experience in testing these things out upon a brilliantly illuminated platform. But intelligence? Hardly . . . The eight most effective actors on our American stage graduated to that stage from the respective professions of shoe clerk, valet, dog trainer, dry goods salesman, circus acrobatic clown, clothing-store sidewalk puller-in, race-track tout and haberdasher's clerk.

## § 11

*The One-Act Play.*—It is commonly argued, and not without a measure of eloquence, that the one-act form of playwriting is just one-third as difficult of accomplishment as the three-act form. This, like many contentions of a kidney, is open to doubt. It is quite obvious, of course, that it is a very much easier thing to write a one-act play like one of Alfred Sutro's than a three-act play like one of Alfred Sutro's, but it is of course quite equally obvious that it is a much easier thing to write a three-act play like one of Alfred Sutro's than a one-act play like one of Lord Dunsany's. The critic who appraises a play by its length is the species of connoisseur who appraises a dinner by the number of its courses or a shirt by the liberality of the portion that one tucks into one's trousers. To judge a work of art by its length is to believe Schnitzler's "Professor Bernhardt" a finer thing than Schnitzler's "Christmas Shopping," Puccini's "Girl of the Golden West" a more lovely thing than Brahms' piano concerto in B flat major, or Rembrandt's "Sortie of the Company of Frans Banning Cock" a meaner work than the cyclorama of the Battle of Lookout Mountain.

## § 12

*The Japanese Play.*—The delusion that a one-act play is, by reason of its being a one-act play, ever a less important creation than a three-act play is a delusion as persistent as that other critical delusion which has to do with the lack of poetry in Japanese plays written by Occidentals. Let an Occidental compose some such play as "The Willow Tree" and even the more discerning theatrical reviewers will find much in it to be cross with, will lament the unconsonant Western prose of it and the absence of congruous Japanese melody, will write comparatively of it that in it (I quote a critical sample) "not only is there no poetry, but, in the employment of a device affording unusual opportunities, there is no original thought, no philosophic comment upon life, no real satire, and very little humour." Granting that all this may be quite true, it remains that there is an equal absence of poetry, original thought, philosophic comment upon life, real satire and humour in the Japanese plays by Orientals. The notion that the drama of Japan is ever a drama of rare fancy and lovely word music is a notion ill-founded. And while this, true enough, may not excuse the Occidental when he sets himself to the composition of a Japanese

play, it is yet manifestly unfair to register against the Occidental the complaint that his play misses something in the real Japanese drama that the real Japanese drama does not itself, save in rare instances, possess.

A careful reading of the plays of the classical stage of Japan (*vide* Marie Stopes' "Plays of Old Japan"; Ezra Pound's notes on Fenollosa and the Noh; etc.) reveals no more poetry, as you will discover for yourself, than the American-Japanese play "The Willow Tree." (The criticism of the latter play is not on this point, but rather that it professes loudly to be a fantasy of the Japan of Hearn and Loti and is in actuality rather a fantasy of the Japan of Minnie Ashley and Julia Sanderson, of Lionel Monckton and Leslie Stuart.) The Occidental playwrights here concerned are less deficient in the matter of poetry than in the matter of catching the spirit of the Japanese dramaturgy. For, as I have said, a survey of such things as "Sandaihagi," "Kayoi Komachi," "Shojo," "Kumasaka" and the like discloses, by way of beautiful imagery, by way of musical simile and mellow metaphor, a score of drab tones for one such wistful and dulcet singing as "like the bell of a country town 'neath the nightfall" (*Suma Genji*), a score and more of flat and stereotyped

“they are piled like the mountains” (*Tamura*) for one such bit as that describing the withering woman Ono (*Sotoba Komachi*), “she is like a dull moon that fades in the dawn’s grip.” So far as philosophy is concerned, there is just as much in the Occidental “Willow Tree” as you will encounter in any of the authentic Japanese plays. And if there is no satire or humour in the former, I assure you there is even less in the latter.

### § 13

*The Biblical Play.*—The belief that the more the characters in a Biblical play act and talk like undertakers the more reverential that play is, is something I have never been able to plumb. The surest way in which to destroy the unmatched poetry of the Bible, to callous the message it heralds and make it go for naught, is to stage it with actors rolling their eyes to the gallery, throwing back their hands palms upward and moaning as if in the throes of a terrible stomach-ache. This is the Bible in terms of “Ingomar” and a tank-town performance of “East Lynne”; this, reverence in terms of a Georgia nigger camp meeting; but it is certainly neither in terms of simple beauty, simple faith and simple common sense. The conventional



theatrical notion that the Bible must ever be read in the woe-is-me tone and that it were a gross sacrilege to picture the good Lord God as speaking in a voice not exactly like the coloratura basso of Mr. James O'Neill or some other such Rialto ham is the offspring of the producers' desire to coddle the demands of clergymen, church-wardens, Sunday School teachers and other such tender intelligences who never go to the theatre anyway.

§ 14

*The Foremost American Producer.*—He is a fat, rosy little fellow in a droll double-breasted overcoat that makes him look like Hi Holler begauded for a Sunday call on his best girl. There is about him always the suggestion that were his coat pockets to be searched, one would discover in each of them a large red apple. His aspect and demeanour are generally those of a surly small boy whose teacher has just slapped his hand for laughing out loud. When perchance this mien passes and he uncorks a guffaw, the detonation is like the roar of the shirt-sleeved Irish lions in a Wilson Barrett play. He makes himself grand with creamy-coloured doeskin gloves which—if I have spotted him accurately—he would seem not to re-

move even at the supper table; and he is to be beheld riding around the town in an automobile as bawdy as a moving-picture actor's. Between the acts of premier performances he goes out and stands alone on the curb and diverts himself by aiming expectorations at distant holes in the pavement. His vanity inspires him to derby hats so rakishly tight that when he takes them off they leave on his forehead deep and apparently painful maroon rings. He seems seldom to open his mouth to say anything and what he does say—so far as I am able from personal observation to report—is not especially interesting nor important. Where he comes from or whither he is going, I haven't the faintest notion—but I have a notion that in that round and as-if rural pate of his there are at this moment the finest ideals, and bravest ambitions, and most vigorous analytical and critical virtues to be found in the American theatre.

And I have this notion for all his periodic promulgation of what seem to me personally to be dull plays, for all his arch practice of such immemorial whimsies as the averment that he never reads the criticisms of his work, for all his having believed it the thing to invite me to dinner after I had written a highly favourable foreword to a book of his, for all the things he does that to my own way of

looking at the theatre are not the right things to do. And why have I this notion of this Arthur Hopkins? I have it because never once so far in his career of independent production has he stooped deliberately to a cheap and shoddy thing; because his aim, whatever his score as I see it, has always been the aim of a conscientious artist; because in pursuit of the achievement of this aim he has been unwavering and has courageously taken many a hard smash between the eyes—some, it seemed to me, deserved and more not deserved; because he has set himself the goal of a vital drama vitally staged and vitally played and to reach that goal has sidestepped many an obviously intermediate and tempting bed of roses with a steadfastness and determination not given to many men in his nation.

In every production that he makes, the man's ideal is clearly discernible—in his good and bad alike. The single sound stylist of our theatre, there is in the plays he chooses and in the manner of presentation which he schemes for those plays the one uniform suspicion of accurate form that reaches the native critical ear. By no means always so effective a popular producer as, say, Belasco, his sense of composition is yet intrinsically of a threefold artistic integrity, delicacy and sound-

ness. This precise sense of composition, true enough, is not entirely original with him: it has been borrowed by him very largely from Reinhardt. But with the latter's producing technic he has adroitly combined the tactical practices of such men as Victor Barnowski and has filtered what he has thus appropriated through the sieve of his own judgment and personality. The result has vouchsafed to us some of the finest productions of the present-day American stage and—where on occasion a play and his technic have by the generic nature of the play made noses at each other—some of the weakest. But good or bad, the effort to do the fine thing at the expense of the hokum thing is ever apparent. And ever apparent, too, are the effort at beauty, and the effort at something just a trifle finer than the next man's effort, and the effort to lift the American play and the American stage above the level of the crook and sleuth and German spy jabberwock on the one hand and the gilt piano and Chinese sofa and Louis XV spit-jar aesthetic on the other.

I often wonder where Hopkins gets all the money to do the things he does after the conscientious and cultivated fashion in which he does them. If he has a silent partner, I should like to know the man's name: he deserves to have the public hear of him.

It is easy enough to get hold of a man to back a French theatre for purposes of personal social exploitation, or to get hold of a man to back a musical show for personal physiological purposes, or even occasionally to get hold of a man to back a first-rate play for purposes of personal puff as a patron of the arts. But I have yet to hear—and I want to hear—the name of this American who so deeply and honestly loves the theatre that he is willing anonymously to hold the bag for any number of first-rate plays his partner desires to produce, for any number of first-rate productions his partner desires to make of them, and for any number of failures that, because the work is first-rate, are bound to ensue. But this, after all, may be said to be not exactly my business.

Hopkins has staged Ibsen in the main more intelligently than any producer before whom I have sat. And my poor old hinterspot has been adjusted into chairs before all sorts of Ibsen productions, big, little and medium, in three quarters of the corners of the world. He is at the present moment the one single producing manager in the American theatre who has demonstrated himself honestly eager to get hold of whatever genuine playwriting the young American is doing—or is trying to do—and who is honestly eager to defend

his faith in it, and who is honestly eager to give it a fair and fighting chance. And in his hope and effort to do this, he has received some of his sorest bumps. Clare Kummer, turned down right and left, came to Hopkins. Eleanor Gates came to him. Moeller came to him. Rita Wellman came to him. Reizenstein and McIntyre and Brown and Housum came to him. And other youngsters by the score come regularly to him as they might come to a sympathetic editor or publisher. Some of them may be—and are—pretty bad, but each gets a friendly attention. In my somewhat peculiarly hybrid office of dramatic critic and magazine editor, I am brought into almost daily touch with that portion of literary young America whose eyes are directed toward the theatre. And I have yet to come across a single such aspirant who wasn't hoping to pin the trust of his future to Hopkins. And some of these, unless I am greatly mistaken, are due to do sound work.

Already in his extremely short career, Hopkins has rescued from the pigeon-hole of oblivion, and has produced, the best and most imaginative dramatic fantasy ("The Poor Little Rich Girl") that this country has given birth to. He has rescued from this same pigeon-hole, and has produced, the most skilful fantastic farce ("Good

Gracious Annabelle”) and the most adroitly composed biographical comedy (“Madame Sand”) and one of the most interesting of modern North European dramas (“The Deluge”) and the most promising serious play come from an American hand in the last four or five years (“The Gentile Wife”). He is, in his presentation of “The Living Corpse,” the first to have brought to the American stage the illuminating method followed by Reinhardt in dramatic production. He is the first to have brought over the adjustable proscenium (employed in “Evangeline”), the first producer to have devised, by a process of editing, the transportable pivotal stage (employed in “On Trial”), the first to have brilliantly adapted to his needs the familiar so-called sheet, or frontal proscenium, lighting of Stanislawski (employed in the second act of “The Gentile Wife”). His production of “A Successful Calamity” was physically the suavest production of social comedy our theatre has proffered. His production of “La Ceña delle Beffe,” the finest in the way of romantic drama. He has, with Robert Edmond Jones, brought—not in one production but in the majority of his productions—a new simplicity and new beauty to American stage decorative art, and for the first time a harmony of dress and scene. He has brought out more hitherto

buried skill among young professional and amateur actors and actresses than any other native producer of comparative experience. And he has explored many of these players out of the wallows of vaudeville and the recesses of tyro joints and the morasses of cheap melodrama. And, while doing all this, he has, of course, not omitted to make more than his full share of mistakes, more than his ample portion of very sour cracks. It is the easiest thing in the world to find fault, eloquently and justly, with Hopkins, but then it is always easier to find fault with a man of ideals than with a man without them. I can readily pick a hundred things wrong with Hopkins where I find difficulty in picking one wrong with Al Reeves. Hopkins says to me, in effect: "I am trying to do the best for the theatre that I know how." And consequently Hopkins metaphorically bends himself down and presents to my critical toe a tempting expanse of rear pant. Reeves frankly says to me, in effect: "I'm trying to do the worst for the theatre that I know how." And consequently I find myself balked. . . . It is easy to miss the bull's-eye if the target at which one essays to shoot is twenty times as far off as one's neighbour's.

The producing theory of Arthur Hopkins, if I may interpret it for him—the critic at his best



is merely the holder-up of a mirror—is, generally speaking, very simply to invest naturalism with as much the quality of beauty as is reasonably to be imagined a part of it. A rose may fall from the window of a Pullman and light upon a New Jersey dunghill—a Cossack marching off to war may carry in a locket the picture of his baby girl—through the skylight of the tenement one may glimpse the stars. This producing theory, made by Hopkins in his polysyllabic essay at self-criticism hight “How’s Your Second Act?” to take on a very profound and esoteric air, is actually as simple as rolling out of bed. And that, of course, is its chief charm and the reason for its voltaism. Hopkins’ attempt to hocus-pocus it forth in his book as akin to a black art of one kind or another is merely that part of him that wears the creamy-coloured doeskin gloves and rides around the town in the peagreen gasolene bus. But taking it simply for what it is, his theory and the accomplishments he has wrought from it mark the biggest single step forward that the artistic producing theatre of America has taken in the last decade.

Here, again, however, have Hopkins and his efforts been met with many a face-making from the kind of critic whose finger was trained by President Lowell to thumb his nose where God designed that

it should only pick it. In Hopkins' striving to give his stage a grace, a style, a natural ease and beauty, such critics have seen only an empty pose, only a mumpsimus, only a trying to do something different for the sake of its being different. It took twelve long years for two of the greatest theatrical producers of Continental Europe to gain first the attention, then the sympathy, and finally the warm and hearty approval of their already civilized critics and audiences for the theory that it is conceivable that an actor may sometimes properly speak with his back to Mr. Alan Dale—and Hopkins has fondly hoped to turn the trick with the native Indians in four! But for all the yokel hoots and rebuffs, he is sticking to the guns of his art and, if the money behind him holds out, he will in time succeed as surely as they in Europe have succeeded. "Do things as they should be done," he says on page 61 of his critical autobiography, "and let the results take care of themselves. We are not merely tired people with trained bears anxious to hear the rattle of pennies in tin cups. . . ."

There, gentlemen, sketchily, is your Arthur Hopkins. He is no "Master," no "Wizard." He is just a young fellow with a dream, who fails twice where he succeeds once, but who feels and knows

that to succeed even once, bravely, finely and without compromise, is worth failing fifty times for. He has had, on several occasions, no harder critic than I—and he will continue to have no harder—but even on such several occasions I have felt, as I shall doubtless continue to feel, the pull of an uncritical prejudice for a man who—as Mencken has written in another direction of James Branch Cabell—is so largely thrown back upon his work for his recompense; who has tried to produce sound and beautiful plays and to get upon the stage the point of view of a civilized man; and who, having succeeded at the business perhaps better than any other who has made the same trial, though he remains still poor in actual worldly return, holds this success a sufficient reward for a self-respecting artist.

### § 15

*On Sentimentality.*—Why it is that we Americans, a nation of sentimentalists, should demand sentimentality in our theatre is not easy of decipherment. The one fact does not dovetail with the other so closely as some believe. The theatre, first and last, is a harbour of diversion. Like cannot divert like. An egoist hates an egoist. A man's sweetheart does not look like his wife. A

restaurant with home-cooking would fail in a week. A soldier, on furlough, does not spend his time in a shooting gallery. . . . The French, a nation as sentimental as we, patronize most liberally plays that are the reverse of sentimental. The Germans, an unsentimental nation, cry copiously into their Pschorrbräu when a *madl* in a cabaret hits the quiver note in a barber-shop melody like "Puppchen." . . .

## § 16

*The Biographical Play.*—The biographical play is probably of all plays the easiest to write well, since the playwright's philosophy and wit, attack and resolution, characters and characterizations, lay already full-blown before him and require but the not difficult manipulation of theatrical wires to set them to dancing. Such dramatic composition, however, always impresses persons profoundly. Yet it is a more simple thing, I venture, to write a play like "Madame Sand" (for all that it approaches to the first-rate in its field) than to write a tenth-rate play like "Up In Mabel's Room."

## § 17

*The Repertory System.*—The best argument against the repertory system is that it elevates the

actor over the play. It asks us at regular intervals to view not a play interpreted by a group of actors, but a group of actors interpreted by a play. The repertory system thus fails in the same way that the Y. M. C. A. athletic system fails. It strengthens the anatomy at the expense of the soul.

## § 18

*Belasco.*—The criticism commonly peddled against David Belasco to the effect that he is sadly content to devote his virtuosity to the mere further begauding and merchenting of the established hokums of the theatre is like most of the Belasco criticism, whether pro or con, unwarrantable and stupid. Whatever may be Mr. Belasco's shortcomings, the easy practice of tried hokums is certainly not one of them. For the Belasco talent, quite other than being a mere slick exposition of such tried and true hokums, is actually a talent—doubtless the most exceptional talent in the native theatre—for painstakingly nursing to life theatrical devices that by all the rules should have been and should be tried and true hokums, but devices that mishandling on the part of other playwrights and producers has caused to go for naught. It is in this business of drawing the hokum essence out

of hokums the hokum juices of which have previously eluded his confrères, that Mr. Belasco excels. This is plainly to be detected in the Belasco trick of turning failures, whose intrinsic hokums were left by playwrights and producers to lie dormant, into hokum-lively successes. There was just as much hokum at the bottom of Edgar Selwyn's failure, "Pierre of the Plains," as there is in Mr. Belasco's success, "Tiger Rose,"—but Mr. Selwyn didn't know how to pop it. "Tiger Rose" is merely a successful version of "Pierre of the Plains," just as Belasco's "Peter Grimm" was merely a successful version of Cora Maynard's failure, "The Watcher," and as Belasco's "Daddies" is merely a successful compound of Francis Wilson's failure, "The Bachelor's Baby," and H. V. Esmond's failure, "Eliza Comes to Stay."

In this "Daddies," the Belasco hokum nursery is to be appraised with an especial pregnancy. Every device that failed to register in the Francis Wilson play, and every device that failed equally of effect in the Esmond play, Mr. Belasco has here carefully poulticed and hot-water-bagged and pillled into commercial robustness. Stratagems that in the two failures had all the earmarks of healthy hokum but that suffered from directing cramps have been taken over, rolled vigorously across a barrel, had

their Little Marys massaged and their toes wiggled, until the Belasco osteopathy has put them firmly upon their legs. And the result, of course, is one of the usual Belasco money-makers which, while characteristically of an utter literary and artistic worthlessness, is still an equally characteristic Belasco caesarian sure-fire operation.

### § 19

*On Banality.*—There is room for banality in the theatre. It is less a thing for critical groan and frown than one is often persuaded to believe. The theatre is an institution wherein one seeks sanctuary from the furors and stressful inconstancy of life, wherein one may sit before the doings of a mock world and sigh oneself into a pleasurable temporary forgetfulness and reverie. Life itself, and the outside world, thrill and torment the individual with their ceaseless changes and mist enwrought adventures and somnabulisms—a shifting panorama of art, loves, business, coincidences, triumphs, defeats, fears and hopes. From all this the theatre offers a refuge. And that refuge may, obviously enough, be had only in spectacles of an antithetical dullness, flatness and stupidity.

One may amuse and divert oneself only by more

or less violent contrasts. Napoleon, after the battle of Abukir, forgot himself in watching a cock fight.

## § 20

*The Modern French Drama.*—The modern French play as represented, among others, by Bataille and Bernstein, remains a triumph of technical skill over drama. Disclosing an exceptional hand for the technique beloved of the professors, these pieces, for all the passion of their content, leave the beholder cold. Spectator at one of them, one is in the mood of the outcast who stands shivering in the snow looking through the window of a room wherein burns alluringly a hot grate fire. It is a favourite practice of the professors to blame this chill not upon the overly meticulous technique, but upon the theory that the Anglo-Saxon is intrinsically alien to the metaphysics and emotions of the Gallic text and hence unable to comprehend and sympathize with the thoughts and actions of its characters. This, of course, is for the most part absurd. The Anglo-Saxon, whatever his antecedents, is today certainly no more ulterior to the Gallic processes of thought and act than he is to the Teutonic, yet the latter drama, as typified by such not far removed writers



as Sudermann, is easily comprehensible to him, as are its characters and the thoughts and actions of those characters. If, indeed, the American cannot encompass the philosophy of passion as it is expounded in the French drama of Bataille, Bernstein, et al., how comes it, on the other hand, that he is able to grasp it as it is expounded in the French drama of de Caillavet and de Flers, Tristan Bernard, Capus, et al.? Whether in the attitude of farce or in the attitude of the so-called problem play, the fibre of this philosophy is, at bottom, the same. If an-alien can comprehend the French way of taking passion lightly, why can he not comprehend the French way of taking it seriously? The divergence from the American approach to the subject is in each case equally broad.

The truth, of course, is that this has nothing to do with the successlessness in America of the serious French drama. Generally speaking, this type of Gallic drama fails in America not so much because of its subject matter as because that subject matter is treated to a technique so rigid, so extravagantly corseted and so unremittingly metronome-like that the evening is deleted of all those qualities of grace and ease, of flexibility and digression, that go to make the quality known locally as "theatre," and in their absence substi-

tute the smell of the drama course lecture room for the smell of the "show." Like the sight of a woman wearing velvet in the early morning, this drama attracts the attention, true enough, but at the same time induces in one a sense of æsthetic nausea. The Anglo-Saxon success of such so-called serious Gallic plays as "Camille" and "Zaza" has undoubtedly been due to their less formal technical manner, to their comparative warmth, in short, to their technical crudities. Some such more recent play as Bataille's "Les Flambeaux," on the other hand, tells an interesting story with a great feeling for dramatic technique and small feeling for theatrical technique. And some such one as Bernstein's "L'Élévation" suffers from the same shortcoming. Both put one in mind of a college professor endeavouring to tell a story at a Seeley dinner. The story is good enough, and the telling of the story is well thought out; but the effect is as nil. The teller and the place of telling are not in harmony.

Against plays of this kidney, we have the more authentic feeling for the cosmopolitan theatre as instanced in the case of the Caillavet-Flers "Le Roi." In such things, the French writer is at his best. His, then, all the sharp nonchalance and sagacity that secede from him when his brows

wrinkle. French farce of this school is genuinely merry stuff—not the French farce more generally known as such in the Broadway playhouses, the machine-made stuff of Soulie, Veber, Nanteuil, Faverne, Nancey and Armont and that lot—but French farce as represented by the collaborators upon the piece in point, and by such witty fellows as the admirable Feydeau, Sacha Guitry, Rip and Bousquet and Romain Coolus.

### § 21

*Harry Watson, Jr.*—That Mr. Harry Watson, Jr., is one of the finest comic artists of the American stage is demonstrated anew with each successive year. An alumnus of the same burlesque troupe that graduated that other excellent comed'ian, Mr. George Bickel, Watson's authentic talents, like those of his colleague, have long been overlooked—or if not entirely overlooked, greatly disparaged—by annalists of the stage who vouchsafe to low comedy merely a casual and then grudging attention. Yet the fact doubtless remains that this Watson is an actor of uncommon quality, not a mere slapstick pantaloon, an assaulter of trousers' seats, a professor of the bladder, but a mimic of exceptional capacity, a pantomimist of the very first

grade and a comedian of real histrionic parts. Watson's depiction of the tenth-rate prize fighter, with its suggestion not simply of such obvious externals as speech, walk, et cetera, but with its subtle revelation of the pug's mind, thoughts and general singularities, is as admirable a bit of acting as the native stage has conceded in years. The thing is searching, vivid, brilliant; it measures with the best work, in more exalted dramatic regions, of such capable actors as Arnold Daly or the late Robert Fischer or Ditrichstein. To see it is to look into the soul of the cheap bruiser as that soul has rarely been transcribed to paper. The half-droop of the one eye, the intermittent Maude Adams toss of the neck, the setting of the far right tooth, the disdain of the lip, the nervous knee—these Watson negotiates with a diplomacy as far removed from the usual and patent tactic as his negotiation of the portrayal of the telephoning commuter is removed from the level of the vaudevilles.

For some reason or other, the work of such comedians as Watson is held generally in artistic and critical disesteem. Why, God and the *Evening Post* alone know. For among these comedians one finds a sensitiveness, an eye to human nature and a schooling in projection that one en-

counters with extreme rarity on the dramatic stage. The scorn these fellows suffer is part of our native theatrical snobbery. In England, George Robey is recognized for the artist he is; in France, Germain and others like him have received their portion. But in our country the actor is rated not so much according to his intrinsic ability as according to the ability of the playwright who supplies his rôles. And yet such a comedian as Bickel remains at bottom a more susceptible and penetrating comic artist than any half dozen Leo Carrillos, and such a comedian as this Watson a more striking adventurer in the gallery of human nature and its portrayal than any double dozen of Russ Whytals, Robert Edesons, Richard Bennetts and Howard Kyles.

## § 22

*Brander Matthews.*—In a uniformly entertaining, if uniformly inaccurate, lecture before the students of Barnard College, Professor Brander Matthews not long ago brewed the following up-to-the-minute philosophies:

“Just as grammar has its conventions,” observed the Professor, “so the drama, too, has its conventions. In Japanese tragedy each performer has a (supposedly) invisible attendant clad in black. They hand a fan,

lift a cloak—and by the middle of the play you do not see them. The Mexicans always have the devil dressed in a United States Cavalry officer's uniform. Is this any more peculiar than, as I have seen in Irving's productions, buildings coming down from the sky and settle down on the stage for a change of scene during an act? Certain conventions are necessary, but some are non-essential, and these the new scenery is trying to do away with. There are conventions also of costume—it took Sir Walter Scott to remove the tall ostrich plumes from Kemble, playing Macbeth, and replace them with a single plume. But there are some inescapable conventions. You always expect to leave the theatre in two hours and a half. Playwrights, therefore, always condense. The characters say just the right things in the right order, which is absolutely untrue to life. Moreover, every character always understands everything the first time it is said! The convention of condensation leads to that of wit, where every one is as witty as the author. Take the convention of Shakespeare, where every character speaks blank verse. This would not be so in life!"

Let us present the Professor with an examination paper on these announced conventions of the drama. And, at the same time, with a convenient "crib."

*First Professorial Convention:* "In Japanese tragedy, each performer has a (supposedly) in-

visible attendant clad in black. They hand a fan, lift a cloak—and by the middle of the play you do not see them.”

*Question:* Is it true, or is it not true, that the Japanese stage has to a large extent sometime since abandoned this convention?

*Answer:* It is true.

*Second Professorial Convention:* “The Mexicans always have the devil dressed in a United States Cavalry officer’s uniform.”

*Question:* Name more than one or two plays in which the Mexicans have presented the devil in such guise.

*Answer:* The circumstance that the Mexicans have once, or twice—or even three times—presented the devil as a United States Cavalry officer makes the dido a convention of the Mexican stage no more than the circumstance that the Americans have once, or twice—or even three times—presented the Italian as a white-slaver makes it a convention of the American stage that Italians must always be presented as white-slavers.

*Third Professorial Convention:* “Is this any more peculiar than, as I have seen in Irving’s productions, buildings coming down from the sky

and settle down on the stage for a change of scene during the act? Certain conventions are necessary, and some are non-essential, and these the new scenery is trying to do away with."

*Question:* See above.

*Answer:* The visible descent of scenery from the flies was due to no scenic convention, but merely to bad lighting arrangements. The new scenery is often lowered into place from the flies just as was the old scenery.

*Fourth Professorial Convention:* "There are conventions also of costume—it took Sir Walter Scott to remove the tall ostrich plumes from Kemble, playing Macbeth, and replace them with a single plume."

*Question:* Was it an invariable and absolute convention to play Macbeth with tall ostrich plumes or was not this merely an idiosyncrasy of Kemble?

*Answer:* It was no more an invariable and absolute convention to play Macbeth with tall ostrich plumes in Kemble's time simply because Kemble so played Macbeth, than it is a convention to play Macbeth with a St. Louis round haircut in James K. Hackett's current time simply because James K. Hackett so plays Macbeth.



*Fifth Professorial Convention:* "But there are always some inescapable conventions. You always expect to leave the theatre in two hours and a half. Playwrights, therefore, always condense. The characters say just the right things in the right order, which is absolutely untrue to life."

*Question:* Is this absolutely untrue to life?

*Answer:* No, this is not absolutely untrue to life. For example, many conversations in actual life between (1) two diplomatists, (2) a good newspaper reporter and, say, a sharp politician or lawyer, (3) the hostess and her guests at a formal dinner, (4) a military officer and his aide. Or a conversation on a definite subject—as in dramatic dialogue—between some such actual persons as, say, Frank Harris and Shaw, or Huneker and Richard Strauss, or even Browning and King. The notion that conversations in actual life are invariably full of stutterings, evasions, you-don't-means, hem's and er's is of a piece with the notion, held by the same theorists, that an expensive cigar is always stronger than a cheap cigar and that an intelligent prize-fighter is more likely to win a ring battle than a first-rate bonehead. Further, equally erroneous is the theory that in drama the characters always say just the right things in the right order. More often, of course, are they made

by the playwright arbitrarily to say just the wrong things in the right order that the consequent befuddlement may institute and prolong the misunderstandings, et cetera, essential to the dramatic action. Examples are at once obvious and plentiful, and range all the way from Hauptmann's "Before Sunrise" to Richard Harding Davis' "The Galloper." If the Professor refers to the direct and consistently relevant dialogue of a play in its relation to the telling of a single and definite dramatic story, he is equally in error when he observes it to be in striking opposition to actuality. What play written in recent years has developed a story more directly than was developed in actual life the story, say, of the recent Grace Lusk murder case? To argue that the story of this case, if turned to the purposes of the stage, would nevertheless be boiled down and reduced to two and one-half hours is to argue that one may read Arnold Bennett's Clayhanger series in two and one-half hours if one only skips the "descriptions."

*Sixth Professorial Convention:* "Moreover, every character always understands everything the first time it is said!"

*Question:* Is this even half-way true?

*Answer:* No.

*Supplementary answer:* If by "understand" you mean "thoroughly comprehend," there are contradictory instances to be found in hundreds of plays. A few examples: "The Poor Little Rich Girl," Schnitzler's "The Hour of Recognition," Pérez-Gladós' "Duchess of San Quentin," Sutro's "The Two Virtues," Mitchell's "The New York Idea," etc. If, on the other hand, by "understand" you mean merely that the ear of this character always catches what that character says the first time he says it—a more likely interpretation—there are contradictory instances also to be found in hundreds of plays. A few examples: "Grumpy," "The Professor's Love Story," "The Gay Lord Quex," "Letty," etc.

*Seventh Professorial Convention:* "The convention of condensation leads to that of wit, where everyone is as witty as the author."

*Question:* Is this even one-third true?

*Answer:* No. The author more often makes all of his characters, save one, dolts or semi-dolts, that his wit, placed in the mouth of the one character, may appear by contrast to be of an exceptional quality. A few examples: Chesterton and the character of the Stranger in "Magic," Shaw and the character of Tanner in "Man and Super-

man," Bahr and the character of Esch in "Principle," Schnitzler and the character of Bernhardt in "Professor Bernhardt," Wedekind and the character of Hetmann in "Hidalla," Capus and the character of Mme. Joulin in "The Two Schools," Tchekov and the character of Trigorin in "The Seagull," etc.

*Eighth Professorial Convention:* "Take the convention of Shakespeare, where every character speaks blank verse. This would not be so in life!"

Well, credit where credit is due. Let us admit that here the distinguished Professor negotiates a real torpedo! For five solid minutes I have tried to think of someone who in actual life speaks always in blank verse, and, by all the gods, I confess it freely, I'm stuck! But perhaps only temporarily. Something tells me, has long told me—that is to say, I have a suspicion—indeed more than a suspicion, a definite feeling—that the Professor himself. . . .

## § 23

*The American Dramatic Criticism.*—Dramatic criticism in America, estimating it by and large, falls currently into either one of two classifications,

each classification being in turn subdivisible into three further classifications.

The first classification is what may be called the college professor dramatic criticism. The three subdivisions of this classification are (1) the college professor dramatic criticism which maintains that dramatic art and morals are inseparable; (2) the college professor dramatic criticism which maintains that dramatic art and the structural technic of Augier, Sardou, et al., are inseparable; and (3) the college professor dramatic criticism which maintains that dramatic art and validity and integrity of thematic idea are inseparable.

The second classification is the newspaper dramatic criticism. The three subdivisions of this classification are (1) the journalistic dramatic criticism which maintains that dramatic art and morals are inseparable; (2) the journalistic dramatic criticism which maintains that a drama is a meritorious drama in the degree that it impudently breaks away from the accepted technical traditions of Augier, Sardou, et al., and (3) the journalistic dramatic criticism which maintains that a play is a good play in proportion as the so-called "message" or propaganda of that play is an opportune one.

Let us consider the theories and practices of each of these representative schools in turn.

First, under the college professor school of criticism—the school of such as the Professors Brander Matthews, Richard Burton, et al.—the theory that dramatic art and morals are inseparable. Under this theory of the inevitable matrimony of art and morals, we find—what? The unintentional and obviously preposterous contention that, since morals are often geographical, dramatic art similarly must often be geographical. Thus, since the college professor school of criticism holds, from the American point of view, that a justification of adultery is under all circumstances immoral where the French point of view holds the reverse, its criticism—obeying this localized attitude—must necessarily hold a play like Henry Bernstein's "L'Elevation," which justifies adultery, a work of dramatic art relatively and distinctly inferior to a play like Edwin Milton Royle's "The Unwritten Law," which condemns adultery. What is art to a Frenchman is not always art to an American. This, the critical standard of the professor. Art, to the latter, is a thing sectional—like baseball, gondola pushing or throwing girl babies to the alligators. A fine drama, like a fine piece of sculpture or a fine piece of music or a fine painting, may not possess universality. Thus, in this first theory, we have the criticism of the Puritan, the chief exponent of

which and the father of which in America was that college professor on an unending Sabbatical year, the late Mr. William Winter.

Second, the college professor school of criticism which maintains that dramatic art and the play-building technic of Augier and Sardou are inseparable. This, the school that elevates the stereotyped drama of Henry Arthur Jones and Augustus Thomas above the independently imagined drama of Shaw, Andreyev, Hauptmann, and Galsworthy: that apotheosizes "The Silver King" over "The Silver Box" and "The Model" over "Cæsar and Cleopatra." To this critical school the inanimate architecture of a house is ever of more importance than the animate persons who live in the house. It gauges a man's condition by looking at the set-up of his body, never by investigating carefully his lungs, heart and bowels. It is, in a word, the theory of pigeon-holes brought to literature, the business of pasting old labels on new bottles, the blind effort to make the modern davenport adhere to the standards of the ancient horse-hair sofa.

And third, the college professor school of criticism which maintains that dramatic art and validity and integrity of thematic idea are inseparable. Here we engage a critical ethic that, stripping it to the bone, would ask us believe that art and fact

are indissoluble, that no man may work out a beautiful tapestry from a premise unsupported by the Magna Charta, the law of gravity and the Mann Act. At one swoop are thus devoured the Hauptmanns of "Before Sunrise" (*vide* Professor Frank Wadleigh Chandler, of the University of Cincinnati, opus I, pg. 36) and the Pineros of "The Thunderbolt" (*vide* Professor Charlton Andrews of the State Normal School, Valley City, N. D., opus III, pg. 120). At one swoop are thus chewed to artistic death the great artists who are guilty of treating only "an incomplete section of life"<sup>1</sup> as opposed to those who, like Mr. Max Marcin in "Cheating Cheaters," treat of the whole majestic panorama, and the great dramatists who are guilty of "weak and, though reasoned, unreasonable logic"<sup>2</sup> as opposed to those who, like Mr. George Hobart in "Experience," are as persistently and desperately logical as a lesson in elementary addition.

So much, for the moment, for this first of our two critical academies. Now for the second, the school of newspaper criticism.

Where, under the initial classification, this journalistic school is in the mass found to maintain, like the college professor school, that dramatic art

<sup>1</sup> See the latter.

<sup>2</sup> See the former.



and morals are inseparable, the reasons for the attitude are here doubtless somewhat more extrinsic than intrinsic—and so more readily comprehensible. These reasons are not difficult of decipherment. It is manifestly impossible for a generally circulated newspaper to toy, however legitimately from the viewpoint of art, with doctrines which are, in the current phrase,<sup>1</sup> not compatible with the policy of journals “intended for the home.” It is certainly an impossible business policy that would permit the printing of a review extolling the theme, viewpoint and treatment of, say, Wedekind’s “Earth Spirit” in the column alongside the big advertisements of Mrs. Winslow’s Soothing Syrup, Grand Rapids double beds, and felt slippers. Where one newspaper like the estimable *Boston Transcript* possesses the independence to dissociate the morals of art from the morals of Fairy Soap and Libby’s Home Salad Dressing—and permits the devil to chase his tail as best he may—there are fifty who quake in their goloshes at the mere thought of what N. W. Ayer and Co. would think of a favorable review of the locally immoral but universally very beautiful art of Dr. Arthur Schnitzler.

<sup>1</sup> Invented and assiduously expounded by the advertising department.

Coming to the second journalistic classification, we encounter the school of newspaper criticism that runs violently counter to the college professor in hailing enthusiastically almost any play that brazenly flouts the conventional technic and substitutes for it a technic that has the air of novelty—or a technic that is a liberal negation of technic. This journalistic school, composed largely of recent college graduates eager to demonstrate to their erstwhile professors their vigorous independence of judgment, holds the Shaw technic superior to the Pinero for no other reason than that it breaks away from tradition; and the flash-back technic of young Mr. Reizenstein's "On Trial" and the flash-forward technic of young Mr. Guernon's "Eyes of Youth" superior to the technic of De Curel for the same reason. This critical group confounds mere superficial novelty with artistic progress and, though vastly more applaudable than the campus critical group by virtue of its greater openness and hospitality to innovation and experiment, is yet found to lean so far and so gymnastically forward that it is continually touching its nose to its toes.

In the third classification we have the journalistic school of criticism which maintains, often with superlative gusto, that a play is a good play in the

degree that the "message" of that play is opportune. In other words, that a work of art is bounded this time not by geographical frontiers, but by the frontiers of time. In short, that a play like the Messrs. Shipman's and Hoffmann's "Friendly Enemies," or Mr. Thomas' "The Copperhead," is by virtue of the acute timeliness and hence strong emotional syringing-power of its thesis a more deserving work of art than some such play as Brieux's "Les Hanneçons" which, while a good play, has yet nothing in it to stir such emotions as have been brought by the trend of current events immediately into the foreground.

These, then, briefly and roughly, are the divisions and sub-divisions of the bulk of dramatic criticism as we of the American today observe it. Founded on the college professor side, upon (1) an almost complete lack of knowledge of the actual theatre and the changes wrought therein in the last decade, (2) a stern disinclination, confounded with poise and dignity, to accept new things and new standards, and (3) a confusion of the stage with the tabernacle pulpit—and founded, on the journalistic side, upon either (1) a desire to attract notice through the eloquent championship of a dramatic under dog or (2) a desire to earn salary in peace and comfort by championing all the upper

dogs—this native criticism reveals a bizarre countenance. It is, on the campus side, a mere very pale reflex of the criticism of William Archer and, on the journalistic, a mere equally pale reflex of the criticism of Clement Scott. I doubt if I exaggerate unduly when I say that neither of these critical schools has in the last dozen years expressed a single thought, a single philosophy or a single recommendation that has assisted an American producer or playwright, however eager and willing, to improve upon his labours or to elevate his standards. If our native theatre has in these dozen years made progress—and that it has made substantial progress there is doubtless none unwilling to grant—that progress has been made, very largely, in spite of the so-called constructive criticism that has been visited upon it. These dozen years have witnessed the birth of the Hopkinses and the Stuart Walkers, the Washington Square Players, the Theatre Guilds, the Provincetown Players and other small theatre groups, in the cradle of the newer and finer American stage. And these births have come about in the face of the dramatic and theatrical race suicide persistently, if not intentionally, urged by the frowzy-tradition celebrating campus critics on the one hand and the surface-novelty celebrating journalistic

critics on the other. What the American theatre needs is not more intelligent producers—it has a goodly share of them—but more intelligent critics. In all the colleges and newspaper offices of the land, there are today not more than two or three men writing professional dramatic criticism who can write as sound, as sober, and as searching criticism as was expounded in the young producer Hopkins' vest-pocket pamphlet named "How's Your Second Act?"

#### § 24

*Drama.*—A theatrical composition which treats of a variable number of characters at that point in their lives when they have all just bought themselves new clothes.

#### § 25

*Roof Shows.*—That such roof music shows as Mr. Ziegfeld's "Midnight Frolic" and Mr. Gest's "Century Whirl" would be more advantageously placed were they moved downstairs into the theatres proper and that such theatre productions as, say, Mr. Morosco's "Cappy Ricks" and Mr. Belasco's "Daddies" would similarly be benefited were they moved upstairs onto the roof, I begin to persuade

myself. I speak, of course, not so much from the purely critical point of view as from that of the practical theatre: for from this latter point of view the gain in such a shuffling of the deck is not difficult of deduction.

Let us consider, first, the roof music shows. After reviewing a dozen or more of these amiable pastimes in the last few years, I have on each occasion been brought to the conclusion that they largely defeat themselves in the very business of polite aphrodisiac wherewith they seek to cater. The reason is simple enough. The success of the music show stage—the stage of the “Black Crooks” of yesterday and the “Follies” of today—is predicated on the polite sensual allure of that stage. And the polite sensual allure of that stage is predicated, in turn, on the eternal allure of what seems to be remote and unattainable. Or in another phrase, what seems to be illusory and esoteric. What we engage here is the same thing that the late Charles Frohman accurately appreciated as obtaining in a measure in the dramatic theatre; the same thing, indeed, that the equally astute Mr. Belasco appreciates today. It was Frohman’s injunction to his leading women players, as it is Belasco’s in this day, ever to keep themselves aloof from the public eye and thus ever to make

of themselves piquing and mysterious figures. "Never allow yourself to be seen on the street—above all, never on Broadway. When you go out, use a closed cab. Do not allow yourself to be seen in public restaurants. But if you must dine out, make it Sherry's. And never allow yourself to be seen with an actor." That was, in part, the shrewd Frohman's dictum. That, in essence, is the dictum, in part, of the equally shrewd Belasco. When one young leading woman one day disregarded the Frohman edict and hoofed Broadway, Frohman promptly got rid of her. (She has never since, incidentally, been successful.) When one somewhat older leading woman one day disobeyed the Belasco command and became fiancée to an ex-actor, Belasco promptly released her from his management. (And she, too, incidentally, has never since been successful.)

The sensual horse-power of a music show is obviously diminished in the degree that the girls are brought into proximity with the gentlemen sitters. In the downstairs theatres this is very clearly to be observed in a comparison of the "Follies" and its distant New Amsterdam stage with the Winter Garden and its relatively intimate runway. In the roof theatres, this horse-power is reduced to what approaches a vanishing point by bringing

the girls so close to the audience that barely a trace of illusion remains. The girls who adorn the remote stage of the Ambassadeurs in Paris get the snooping American pew-holder by the ear; the same girls, dancing familiarly at close range in the garden between the acts, merely bring him to uncork a blue chuckle. A stage of the Hofopertheater<sup>1</sup> of Vienna, commonly agreed by visiting connoisseurs to hold the fairest and most fetching wenches in the world, is farther removed from the audience than any other operetta stage in the world. . . .

Any music show, however poor, is a certain success the male members of whose audience go their several ways at the fall of the final curtain individually wishing that they had the telephone number of this or that particular girl. (I appreciate that this isn't precisely the sort of criticism deeply admired by the Drama League Ilidors but, as every music show producer knows, it is true.) And the hankering for this connection is plainly more fully cultivated by the distance-lends-enchantment stratagem of the downstairs stage than by the present misguided roof move of bringing the pseudo-lovely one within such close range that the Louisville and Allentown admirers may cruelly

<sup>1</sup> I of course speak of this theatre at such times as its stage deserts opera for the lighter music play.



assess the mirage in terms of devastating grease paint, moles, gilt teeth, loud perfumery, stocking seams and hooks and eyes. The most beautiful woman's beauty diminishes in the degree that it comes toward the male eye; the most beautiful woman in the world, scanned nose to nose, betrays previously unsuspected and discordant blemishes. And—"*les illusions ne sont-elles pas la fortune du cœur?*"

But where this intimacy is highly damaging to the music show, it is precisely the reverse in the instance of drama. If the remote Hofoperntheater stage has been an extraordinarily prosperous operetta stage by very reason of its remoteness from the stalls, the remote late New Theatre stage was an extraordinarily unprosperous dramatic stage by very same reason of its equal remoteness from the stalls. And since the modern practical dramatic theatre has increased its fortunes as it has more and more increased the intimacy of its dramatic stage and auditorium—going back, in this, to the auspicious principles of antecedent centuries—one cannot but believe that, still speaking practically, this theatre might not augment its financial fortunes even more by developing the intimacy to an even greater degree.

When Mr. Belasco produces a dramatic piece like "Daddies," it is assuredly reasonable to assume that Mr. Belasco does so purely and simply to make money. To believe that Mr. Belasco believes that a play like "Daddies" is an art-work and that its presentation will enhance his standing in the art world, is a gooseberry too sour to suck. Therefore, since the question is primarily one of boodle, it is an eminently safe assumption to believe that "Daddies," were it presented on a roof, would prove not only a much more amusing show than it proves to be downstairs, but that, hence, by way of predicate, it would make much more money than it makes downstairs. And why? Firstly, because it would on the roof still appeal to all the same sentimentalists who admire it in the more austere nether confines of Thespis and, secondly, because it would on the roof further appeal to all those who have no relish for its diabetic pollyannaism as it is currently presented. And why again? Because while those persons who presently admire it downstairs would admire it equally upstairs, those persons who presently do not admire it downstairs would find it a great diversion upstairs where—following the Ziegfeld and Gest roof idea—they might throw balls at the actors, ring

bells when the dialogue became too swashy, and squirt siphons at the diabolically cute stage children.

Aside from the undeniable facts that such plays as "Daddies"—and there are regularly dozens of them along Broadway—would profit more with roof audiences who were somewhat squiffed than with the cold sober downstairs shoppers, would make a better impression, and would hence be doubly successful, these plays—were they moved up to the roofs and made the subject of characteristic roof *divertissement*—would by this change in projection draw to them the large number of persons who cannot stomach their idiotic uplifterei in its current condition of presentation. A man who presently couldn't be drawn in to see a piece like "Daddies" with a halter would be delighted to see it on the New Amsterdam or Century roof where, when Mr. John Cope, *ætat* fifty-one, comes out in the rôle of a college boy, he might stop eating his chop suey long enough to throw a cane ring over Mr. Cope's ear or where, when Mr. Bruce McRae as a great novelist observes that he must hurry up work on the last chapters of his serial since otherwise George Horace Lorimer will have to hold up the presses of the *Saturday Evening Post*, he might, in the playwright's absence, in-curve one

of the cotton balls against the M. McRae's aft-pant.

Look at the situation honestly, without hypocrisy, and tell me if eight out of every ten of the so-called straight plays annually uncovered along Broadway might not thus be made much more enjoyable and profitable. I do not refer, plainly enough, to the respectable play that every once in a while contrives to show its head above the Rialto slopjar, but to the omnipresent exhibition of purely commercial showshop accent. Thus, such a play as "Just Around the Corner" that lasts a scant week in the dramatic rathskeller and induces a mental morbus might upstairs prove a gay diversion and last many months. For here was excellent roof material gone to waste. Picture the pleasure that the theatregoing public might gain by ringing the table gongs on such venerable Hobart *mots* as the best book to be had in the small town being a mileage book back to New York, alluding to the sheriff as Mr. Marshall and, upon one character's mistaking Pompeii for a man, causing another to observe that he died of an eruption! Picture the immense enjoyment to be procured from using the little wooden hammers on such goatee'd hokums as the man kissing the wrong girl in the dark, the repentant youth from the Reformatory

upon whom suspicion of robbing the safe is made cruelly to rest, and the climacteric nosing out of the rich villain by the poor pure young heroine! True enough, one would wear out one's right arm, but think of the fun.

Take other downstairs plays. Even a play of infinitely better grade, such as "Molière," would be improved by the change. For in the instance of a play of this better kidney the performance on the floor in the very midst of the roof audience would relieve the present performance of much of its hurtful chill. The effect, on the intimate roof floor, would be to bring the audience out of its present twentieth century mood and, by the curious *famillistère* potency of theatricalism, make it in spirit part of the court about the fourteenth Louis. There would be no loss of respect for the text, but a subconsciously provoked gain in respect. This trick, in small measure, was utilized by Granville Barker in his staging of the induction to Shaw's "Fanny's First Play." Reinhardt, on a large scale, executed the same plan with great success in his Kammerspielhaus when, on one occasion seven years ago, by carrying the scenic decorations and lighting out into the auditorium he literally contrived to lift his audiences bodily over into the milieu of the dramatic characters. In

Japan, of course, the scheme is familiar. And William A. Brady, in this country, tried out the idea very happily in the last act of "Pretty Peggy" when, by filling a portion of the orchestra chairs with supers in costume, he converted the balance of the audience into actors in the scene.

Some years ago, I read in an Italian periodical devoted to the stage a somewhat analogous suggestion as to vaudeville. The critic here contended that the trouble with vaudeville was that the vaudeville audience was ever short-sightedly regarded as of the same complexion as the dramatic audience, whereas it must be plain even to the most eminent Drama Leaguer that the two audiences are of as diverse species as jackass and owl. The Italian critic maintained, therefore, that since vaudeville audiences are very largely of a piece with the kind of yokels who, in our country, merrily spend their holidays in the so-called Steeplechase Parks getting deathly sick on roller coasters, fracturing their ribs in revolving barrels and catching pneumonia by standing agape in a mechanically operated blast of wind that blows hats off and skirts up—that since this is the case, vaudeville audiences should be handled in a similar vein by the vaudeville impresarios. To make vaudeville doubly enjoyable to these persons, argued the critic, the

chairs in a vaudeville dive should be so built that they would drolly collapse when sat upon, that the hat holders under the seats should impart electric shocks, that the ventilators under the chairs should at unexpected intervals squirt streams of water into the faces of the sitters, and so on.

But to return to the roof music shows. That these shows would be measurably better placed in the downstairs theatres must be apparent to anyone who has sat critically before them. One goes to a music show, obviously enough, not to hear, as in the case of a dramatic piece, but to see. Therefore, where in the potential instance of a roof-presented dramatic piece like, let us say, "The Burgomaster of Belgium," it would not matter much whether one saw the actors or not so long as one could hear what they were up to, in the instance of one of the current roof-presented music shows it quite as certainly does matter. That these music shows would be better placed in a downstairs theatre where one's view of Lillian Lorraine was not periodically cut off by the migratory hinter anatomy of a fat Swiss waiter and one's pleasurable appraisal of Mollie King every other minute interrupted by the moving across the vision of the ambulatory person of a Roumanian bus boy, no one can well contradict. When—as I have

often written—I am courteously invited by the management of a roof music show to inspect Martha Mansfield or Rosie Quinn and then, just as the lovely virgin shoots out onto the floor, my eye meets instead with the enormous posterior of a roving garçon, I am intelligibly provoked.

When I visit a roof show—and I presume that I am not much different from other men—I visit it primarily not to hear the so-called music, nor listen to such accompanying rhymes as “A sweet French grisett-a, whose name it is Yetta,” nor envisage tableaux disclosing a scowling chorus man in a red undershirt and placarded “The Spirit of Anarchy,” but merely and purely, plainly and simply, to look over the girls. And when my eye is caressed by a creature sufficiently fetching to take my thoughts for the moment off such of my habitual ruminations as the occulsion of the aqueduct of Sylvius in relation to hydrocephalus, or the question of orokinase and ptyalin in the saliva of a horse, I don’t wish to be interrupted. It is distressing to go to a roof with the notion of getting the little Quinn and her chemise dance to rid the tired mind of speculations on the phenolsulphone-phthalein test and its application to surgical diseases of the kidneys, or with the intention of getting the Mlle. King’s pretty legs to make one agree-



ably forget for the nonce such workaday problems as the genetic study of plant height in *phaseolus vulgaris*, to say nothing of the notion of summability for the limit of a function of a continuous variable, and then find that at the Miss King's very first knee exposé or the Miss Quinn's second wiggle a nomadic chow main butler, cigar vivandière or winepail porter is shutting the gentle houri from view.

The august Professor Richard Burton may rather look at Holbrook Blinn than at Marilyn Miller, but I call upon such of my somewhat softer arteried friends as the Professors William Lyon Phelps and Archibald Henderson to lift their right hands to the ceiling, smack the Book, face the jury, and solemnly on their sacred words of honour swear that they would do likewise.

## § 26

*Avery Hopwood.*—In the concoction of suavely risqué farce, Avery Hopwood usually stands head and shoulders above his perspiring American rivals for the simple reason that while any number of the latter probably know just as much about writing risqué farce as he does, there isn't one who knows, as he knows, how to write risqué Eng-

lish. There are probably a dozen American farce writers who can evolve better ideas for their farces than Hopwood is able to evolve for his; and there are many who are considerably more fertile in devising original and more comically impudent characters and situations. Yet not one of them can write a farce half so good as Hopwood, since not one of them understands his native language, and the acrobatics of that language, so well as Hopwood.

It is this virtue that Hopwood's even most friendly critics habitually overlook. To praise Hopwood, as he is generally praised, for his invention in the way of politely risqué situation, is to praise him very largely for a talent that is not especially his, since more than one such excellent situation has been bodily appropriated by him from the work of this and that European writer. The amusing Hopwood calendar situation in "Sadie Love," for example, is a literal borrowing of the same amusing situation from Sacha Guitry's farce, "La Prise de Berg-op-Zoom." And the Hopwood bed-moving situation in "Fair and Warmer" is a brother to much the same situation in Jean Martet's farce "Les Ingrats," as the servant situation in "Our Little Wife" is to the servant situation in Rip's and Bousquet's "L'Habit d'un Laquais."

Thus, also, to praise Hopwood, as he is generally praised, for the originality of his farcical themes is equally to miss the mark. The soul swapping, astral body conceit of his poorest farce, "Double Exposure," for example, was already long familiar in the German von Scholz's farce, "Exchanged Souls." But the general failure to praise Hopwood for his high cunning in the writing of naughty English, for his happy knack of selecting precisely the proper word for precisely the improper place, is to miss the mark even more widely. For it is in this gymnastic that Hopwood excels every other American writing for the farce stage and not only every other American, but, as I have hereinbefore pointed out, a number of the talented Frenchmen as well.

Hopwood knows how to write this risqué English because, first, he knows how to write English. Unlike his Broadway farce-making competitors, he appreciates that good farce is not to be manufactured by walking the floor like a caged hyena and shooting dictation at a stenographer out of the edge of the mouth. He understands that writing is writing, and not merely the recording of extemporaneous conversation. He knows that it is as absurd to suppose that, since a play is to be spoken by actors, the spoken word of the actors is best to be made to seem

natural through the author's experimental speaking instead of writing that word, as it would be to suppose that since a waltz is to be danced by dancers, the leg-work of the dancers is best to be made to seem graceful through the composer's experimental dancing instead of writing that waltz. (That the Mozarts of modern farce, de Caillavet and de Flers, are an exception in this is a contradiction not especially more pertinent than the circumstance that Mozart improvised a strict fugue on the clavichord at fourteen is a contradiction of the fact that fugues are made and not born.) In almost every word that he writes, Hopwood's discrimination and care are apparent. Like Langdon Mitchell, he seeks his audience's laughter less through an intricate joking sentence than through a single joking adjective. As Mitchell, in his comedy "The New York Idea," brews a good round chuckle merely by dropping the adjective "miscellaneous" into an apt place, so Hopwood in some one of his farces like "Sadie Love," say, turns the same trick by dropping the little adjective "first" into an equally apt place. And where one of the sweating Broadway farce heavers like Mr. Mark Swan, for instance, works tooth and nail to get a laugh by laboriously combining a joke from the *Birmingham Age-Herald* with the spectacle of a fat

actress in green pajamas, Hopwood contrives to get a tripled laugh by the much simpler expedient of selecting carefully a single peppery, appropriate verb.

However greatly one of his farces may happen to vary from the standard he has set for himself—personally, I believe his “Our Little Wife” to be his best work—there is little Hopwood writes that I do not experience a pleasure in contemplating. Like Victor Herbert, he never does anything without its touch of quality. There is always a cosmopolitan twinkle of eye, a gay phrase, an amusing—if, in truth, entirely superficial—hitting on this or that human idiosyncrasy. Taking his farce writing by and large, I suppose he intrinsically resembles the young Guitry more than he resembles any other Continental. Like Guitry, his comment on life is most frequently negligible; and like Guitry, his satiric sense, if he has such a sense, remains largely invisible; but like Guitry, too, he can take a sheet of gay tissue paper and with a fancy adroitness twist it into an exceptionally jocund foolscap. Born in Ohio, I believe, and graduated from the college at Ann Arbor, Michigan, he is paradoxically as Parisian in his writing as this Guitry. And he is the only man writing risqué

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farce in America whose work has any finish, any style, or any metropolitan flavour.

### § 27

*The Potboilmakers.*—In the world of modern dramaturgy, the English hack takes categorical precedence over the hacks of Europe and America in the enterprise of writing bad plays as dully as is by human effort possible. The American hack at his worst is always a cut or two above the English hack at his worst: however empty his play there is generally a touch of sharp Americanism, a dash of vulgar honesty, that catches the ear. And the French hack or German hack, the Italian or the Austrian, contributes to his dismal masterpiece at least a flash of phrase or dim suggestion of quasi-philosophy. But the English hack reaches heights of virtuosity in stenciled balderdash unscaled by his drivelling contemporaries. This is true not only in the instance of dramatic writing, but in the other forms of literature; for the English hack novels of such as the immensely popular Nat Gould are as far inferior to the American hack novels of such as the equally popular Harold Bell Wright, or to the French hack novels of such as the equally

popular Henri Bordeaux, or to the German hack novels of such as the once almost equally popular Heinz Tovote, as the English hack plays of such as Horace Annesley Vachell are triumphantly inferior on all counts to the American hack plays of such as William Hurlbut, or the French hack plays of such as Lucien Gleize, or the German hack plays of such as Rudolf Holzer, or the Austro-Hungarian hack plays of such as Vajda Szinház, or the Danish hack plays of such as Carl Gjellerup, or the Italian hack plays of—

But no need to continue the tedious catalogue. Nothing in all the modern writing for the stage attains to the dull splendour of an Englishman writing at his dullest. At his worst the Englishman is as difficult of matching as at his best. Search the records of current theatrical writing the world over and one will be at pains to discover equals in the art of sheer inanity for such British masters of bavardage and twattle as Jennings, Porter, Devereux, Worrall, Morton, Hemmerde, Vansittart, Nielson, Howard, Brandon, Lonsdale, Dunn, Coleby, Martindale, Pleydell, Fenn, Thurston, Terry, Raleigh, Hodges, Percival, Harwood, Vernon, Owen, Parry, Stayton, Frith, Gibson, Hamilton, Jeans, Lion, Merivale, Chilton, Ellis, Carr, Denny, Fernald. . . .

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This last, though American born, is by personal vote, long residence, activity, taste and training, as English as a mutton chop or tight shirt, and a typical example of the contemporaneous English rubber-stamp professor. Twenty years ago, this Mr. Chester Bailey Fernald, then living in the land of his birth, wrote a first-rate short story and a second-rate, though rather diverting, one-act play. But in the nineteen years elapsed he has composed not so much as a single phrase touched with grace or originality, with resonance or wit, with melody or observation or philosophy. The plays he has written, from "The Moonlight Blossom" to "The Married Woman," from "98-9" to "The Day Before the Day," from "The Pursuit of Pamela" to his most recent "Three for Diana" out of "The Third Marriage" of Sabatino Lopez, are in each instance illuminatingly representative of British hackdom on the flying trapeze.

I do not mean to single out Fernald as the worst of this sour school, or even the second worst. He is by no means the worst. But he combines in himself so many of the deficiencies and absent qualities of the present-day British drama drudge that, as well as any other, he may be selected by way of horrible example. It is a characteristic of Fernald, as of his colleagues in the arts of unimaginative



writing, that he works almost entirely in terms of the platitudes, treadmills, stock phraseology and stale literary baggage of the stage. And this habit is so deeply ingrained that it operates even when he gives himself over to the transposing of a play manuscript from one language into another, just as it operates in like situation in the instance of such of his fellow doctors of stencil as Fagan, Hicks, Farquarson Sharp, Bithell, et al. In example whereof, I append a few examples from the adaptation by Fernald of the aforementioned Italian "Il Terzo Marito"—examples of the substitution of so many coccygine vaudeville-sketch cackles for what might, by the simple and obvious means of direct translation, have been retained as somewhat less banal and moth-eaten stuff:

1. "The mere *sight* of you makes me grow younger. It's like a breath of the sea air!"
2. "*You* are free; *I* am free! What is the use of having freedom if one cannot make happiness out of it? Marry me and the world will be just big enough to hold our happiness!"
3. "I have (*dropping her eyes*) something to tell you. When you have heard me, probably you will want to reconsider your proposal."
4. "I decided to talk the matter over with her once again. She had insisted that we should not refer to it again."

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5. "But under that moon, under those silent stars, with the music of the waves beneath us. . . ."
6. "How she has changed in a year! She was a *child* then; now she is a *woman*!"
7. "I wrote you not to come until now because I wanted to give you a chance to think. I wanted you to be prepared for (*pause*) what we shall have to say to each other."
8. "What do *you* know of life? *Nothing!* There is a great, beautiful world still to be opened to you!"
9. "You have had no experience. You are a beautiful unwritten page."
10. "When I looked into your eyes—I can see your eyes every night whenever I close my own in the dark—the first time I looked into them and every time since—something has happened in my heart."
11. "If I talk lightly about the most serious things in the world, it does not mean that I am frivolous. I was never so serious in my life. And you are not going to tell me (*gulping*) that there is another?"
12. "If you send me off, I shall never get over it as long as I live!"
13. "My own feelings were a trifle hurt, at first; but when you explained, I saw that your intentions were as kindly as they always are."
14. "And what, pray, do you know about *me*?"

Add to these sentimentalized stencils the injection of an alien dose of morals, the joke about the practise of exchanging duplicate wedding presents, the joke about the climate of England, the joke

about married persons fighting with each other, and the joke about woman's habit of changing her mind, and one achieves a fair idea of the Fernald operations in adaptation. I have seldom laid eyes on a sadder job. The Italian original, true enough, is in the most liberal accounting a third-rate effort, but Fernald has dexterously plunged it thirty peps farther down the scale. He has changed the incandescent Italian lover into a cool cockney cucumber; he has turned the saucy widow into a dour Prince of Wales's Theatre clothes-horse; he has removed the gin from the cocktail in Acts III and IV; he has written over the Italian phraseology into the phraseology of the commonplace London curtain-raiser. In the original, a kind of high-comedy matrimonial "Baby Mine"—though in no sense and in no degree so adroit or humorous a work as Miss Mayo's—the play is revealed in this typical British hack adaptation as a windmill turning furiously in a dead calm.

## § 28

*The Drama of Ideas.*—The theatre, for all the whoops and hopes of its academic whiffers, is actually the last place in the world for the exposition of ideas. The so-called drama of ideas—using

the word idea in its strictest sense—is as much an anomaly as California Rhine wine. Imagine even the tremendous genius of a Shakespeare deducing from the influence of the conception of evolution on philosophy a sober play that wouldn't put its audience to sleep. Imagine Hauptmann a Newton, de Curel a Haeckel, Dunsany a Thomas Hobbs—and then imagine sitting through their dramatic stage conclusions. The drama of ideas must be—in fact, is—merely a drama of inklings. It must be, by its intrinsic soul, even in its highest forms, less a substantial projector of such ideas as Vernon Wollaston's on the variation of species, Lange's on the emotions, Durkheim's on the division of labour or Tarde's on anti-naturalism than an amiable juggler of such easy speculations and second-hand quasi-philosophies as Andreyev's on the burden of religion, as Dunsany's on fate, as Brioux's on heredity and Galsworthy's on social economics. One genuine idea, expounded soberly and soundly without the hocus-pocus of stage tinsels, would suffice to crowd the nearest blind pig to the doors fifteen minutes after the rise of the first curtain.

## § 29

*Hokum.*—Probably nowhere else do the popular playmakers of Broadway reveal their imaginative shortcomings so clearly as in the employment of what is known colloquially as hokum. In particular, comedy hokum. This species of hokum, or positively provocative comic antic, these playmakers scarcely ever embellish, scarcely ever elaborate, scarcely ever trick out in fresh gauds or overhaul. Year in and year out, and (though still largely sure-fire) become drably stereotyped and threadbare, this hokum of tripping over the doormat, throwing an imaginary object into the wings and having the stagehand thereupon strike a gong, and the like, is promulgated in all the glory of its venerable whiskers. The rubber-stamp hokum of the *guignol* who gets his hand stuck in the decanter, who under the guise of camaraderie gives his companion a staggering whack across the shoulder blades, who emphasizing a point stamps on his confrère's toe, who bends himself in at the middle as if anticipating a boot from the rear, who peeking into a window painted on the back-drop winks over his shoulder at the audience as if he were spectator of saucy didoes transpiring within—these playmakers provide season after season. And yet more

novel hokum, and doubtless by virtue of its comparative freshness more telling hokum, were readily improvised. For example, the droll mule who moves aside his finger-bowl and dips his fingers grandly in the demi-tasse. For example, the gabby Polonius who, just as he has worked up to full eloquence, drops his *pince-nez* in the soup. For example, the vengeful hanswurst who very, very slowly lifts up his foot in order to bring it down hard on his neighbour's great toe, suddenly with a seraphic grin lets it fly, and, while still grinning, feels it descend with an awful crack on his own. For example, the *vir borealis* who lifts the telephone receiver off the hook and, without calling a number, enters forthwith into the midst of a very intimate conversation. . . .

### § 30

*The Star System.*—Some fifteen years ago and still in the critical egg, it was one of the major diversions of my almost ceaseless indignation regularly to deride and pummel the so-called star system of the American stage. Against this system and its personages I was wont to discharge profoundly manufactured dialectic and abuse, supported by what then seemed to me to be exceedingly sanguinary epigrams, deadly *mots* and bomb-like

similes and metaphors. Let a physiologically choice young woman, newly graduated to stage eminence from some managerial love sofa, show herself in anything more than the merest eight-point advertisement, and promptly I had at her with some such very ironical definition as "Star: A heavenly body." And let a Figaro somewhat less capable than Forbes-Robertson or Moissi, but possessed of two-inch eyelashes, be elevated overnight by some astute impresario from the part of the butler to anything more important than *friend to Bassanio*, and I was upon the poor fellow with something like "A proficient actor is one who is successful in completely immersing his own personality in the rôle he is playing; a star actor, one who is successful in completely immersing the rôle he is playing in his own personality." And having thus performed upon these poachers and depredators, I would chuckle myself to sleep and arise early the next morning to detect the death rattles and watch the star system roll over, gasp, and die. But each morning, much to my chagrin and utter incomprehension, the impersuasible stars and their system—for all my seemingly unsurmountable objections—appeared to get stronger and rosier. For the more assiduously and sarcastically I would lay to the night before with cutlass, machine gun, cup custard,

broom handle, dynamite, axe, old slipper, field pieces and pea-blower, the more would I hop out at suncrack to view the enormous stacks of corpses and be dumfounded to hear only a peaceful, rhythmic, and apparently very comfortable snoring.

But I was young then, and not disheartened. For two—three—years, I kept at the job, hurling soft puddings and bricks, fashioning biting pronunciamentos, installing secret wireless stations on the roof, brewing devastating repartees, and shooting off thousands of lethal things like “Why these extravagant hymns to Madame Sarah Bernhardt because she possesses the courage to appear on the stage with a wooden leg? A leg is approximately but a one-sixth part of the human body. There are therefore any number of star actresses amongst us who, in the matter of woodenness, have the Madame beaten six to one.” And not only did the stars themselves daily come in for my mortal comments—as for example, “An actor is one who cannot act; a star actor, one whose exceptional virtuosity in this direction has brought him recognition from a manager”—but also the audiences who, against my expressed wish, seemed to rush to see the stars in such numbers that I was compelled to take a side-street to get to my home. Of the women who went to make up these audiences I would caustically ob-



serve that they fell into two classes: those who thought that James K. Hackett was too grand for words, and those who thought that James K. Hackett would be too grand for words if he got his hair cut. And of the masculine element, that the three greatest star comedians in America were (1) Dan Daly; (2) Thomas Q. Seabrooke; and (3) the man who could laugh at Frank Daniels. And of the programs handed to these audiences (nothing was out of the range of my pig-balloon), that they were devices subtly employed by theatrical managers to persuade the audience to believe that the play it was about to see was going to be acted—or, again, that they were pamphlets circulated by the producer to assure the audience that the theatre was disinfected of germs with C N Disinfectant and the play disinfected of drama with actors.

To reinforce this epigrammatic front line, I would then hustle up from the rear a heavy artillery of smoking similitudes and analogies, among them such *cartouches* as the likening of this star actress' carriage to a buckboard and that star actor's vehement articulation of grief to a long train of freight cars in the act of unbuckling. But the more I performed, the longer grew the lines at the box-offices of the houses wherein the stars were playing and the more the newspapers gave over

their pages to the public's insistent demand for interviews in which the star actresses explained how difficult it was for inexperienced and innocent women like themselves to act sophisticated rôles of the Camille and Zaza type and how (*business of shuddering*) it was therefore necessary for them to take up with one of these creatures in order closely to watch and study her. And so great presently became the popularity of the heterogeneous stars and the public's relish for them that it was a rare Sunday newspaper that gave one-tenth the space to the Philippine muddle and the Nan Patterson case that it devoted to this star's confession that she was originally a well-known society girl of Roanoke, Va., or to that star's opinion that women should not smoke in public. Photographs of star actresses' Chinese hounds and star actors' "country homes" at Bay Shore, Long Island, edged the pictures of James R. Keene's Sysonby, Adlai E. Stevenson's birthplace and the hotel clerk who had discovered that Maxim Gorky and the lady were not married, off the first page—and interviews in which star actresses told how much moral good was being done by the play in which they were acting crowded Delmas' remarks back opposite the Siegel-Cooper advertisement. Thus, of an already lusty seed, did the star system of the popular theatre—for all the

hogsheads of vinegar I poured upon it—blossom to its present sweeping proportions. And why? Very simply, because in spite of such amiable clowns as the Nathans of a decade and a half ago and the Hamiltons of the present day, this star system is not the pox claimed for it, but actually a very valuable, a very sound, and very prophylactic institution.

The steadily increasing success of the star system is a tribute to the superior critical sagacity which the mob, as opposed to the so-called cultivated minority, on very rare occasions evinces. It was the American mob that got the proper measure of Maeterlinck while the minority was still extolling him as a second Shakespeare. It was this same mob, that, on another level, detected the photographic virtues in Charles Hoyt and George Ade and George Cohan while the minority saw in the first only a cheap farce writer, in the second only a slangy buffoon and in the third only a very cocky young man who was given to singing about the American flag through his nose. And it was this mob again, and not the minority, that first soundly appraised at their correct values such diverse native artists as Mark Twain and Montague Glass. The theatre mob of Washington, in the very teeth of its critical minority, first detected the virtues in

Barrie's "Peter Pan." The theatre mob of Philadelphia, in the teeth of its critical minority, first detected the virtues in Eleanor Gates' "Poor Little Rich Girl." The theatre mob of New York, in the teeth of its critical minority, measured accurately the virtues of Sheldon's admirable dramatization of Sudermann's "Song of Songs." It sometimes happens! And one of these sometimes is vouchsafed us in the mob's acute realization that, far from being a damaging vice, the star system has been one of the most trenchant forces working toward the prosperity of a better American, or American-presented, drama and a more elevated American cabotinage.

Let us consider the situation. Not theoretically, but in terms of available fact. In the first place, then, is the star system, even as we at present rather absurdly have it, inimical to the sound presentation of good drama? I reply to the question by asking another. Are such plays as Galsworthy's "Justice" and "Silver Box," for instance, in any way depleted of artistic force by the starring in them even of such variable actors as the Barrymores, *frère et soeur*? Are these dramas not actually invested with a greater artistic force by this managerial emphasis of the leading rôles? (When the dramatist places his emphasis upon a certain rôle

—as he does four times in five—why should it be held an artistic error for the dramatist's producer to do likewise?) Is the same author's "Strife," presented (as it has been) without the stress of stars, relatively more forceful or more soundly composed and presented? And are not stars in such instances of an actual tonic advantage, since they frequently attract to worthwhile drama many susceptible persons who might otherwise remain away?

Again, consider the effect of the star system upon acting. Germany, Austria and, in considerable measure, France know no such greatly—and apparently ridiculously—elaborated starring system as the American. As a consequence, for all one reads to the contrary in the learned books on the drama written by the two-building-college professors of Mechanical Engineering and Botany, the general average of the acting in the American theatre is at present of a quality quite as good as, if not superior to, that on any of the stages named. In the entire theatre of Germany and Austria in the year of the late war's outbreak there were a number of actors like Schroth, Albert Heine, Moissi, Grube, Lindemann and Kayssler of a vivid and exceptional talent; but the absence of an encouraging and inspiring star system had left the

rank and file in a sorry state of under-development. Moissi is a very much better tragedian and character actor than our star system has developed and Schroth a better performer of the average straight rôle, but for every other Germano-Austrian actor of any authentic grade it is not difficult to name at least two—and in some cases perhaps as many as three—American or naturalized American or Anglo-American actors. Similarly, while the French actor like Guitry  *fils* , say, is of course a vastly more proficient farceur than the American, he is on the whole inferior to the latter in the other instances of dramatic interpretation. For one Max Dearly the American stage can boast three or four equally good, if not better, low comedians. For one Guitry  *père* , the American stage gives you a twofold correlative talent. Try, for example, relatively to match French actor for American star in the instances of Arnold Daly, John Drew, William Faversham, Walter Hampden, David Warfield, Lew Fields, Leo Ditrichstein, Fritz Leiber. . . .

Coming to the women, the case is even more illuminating. And it is not necessary to support one's contention with the names of the American women whose right to stardom has been—or is—uncontested. Take the cases of those whose

status has not been, is not, so fully agreed upon. And on this plane search Germany or Austria or France for an actress capable of giving a better, sounder and more artistically telling performance than such as-if-too-suddenly manufactured and professorially scoffed at stars as the Fenwick of "The Song of Songs," the Ulrich of "Tiger Rose," the Starr of "The Easiest Way," the Jolivet of "Where Ignorance is Bliss," the Stevens of "The Unchastened Woman," the Reed of "Roads of Destiny," the Keane of "Romance," the Ferguson of "The Strange Woman," the Taylor of "Mrs. Dakon's Daughter." . . . Was Ethel Barrymore's talent corrupted—was it not rather encouraged to fructification—by Frohman's starring of her when she was still an artistically immature and merely very pretty girl? Would the comedic talent of Margaret Lawrence, say, be in any way encompassed and made sterile if the Selwyns were to make a star of her tomorrow?

The objection to the star system is conventionally based upon two assumptions—both of which are false. The first of these assumptions is that it tends to destroy smooth ensemble performances. What it actually does in the majority of instances is precisely the opposite. In example whereof, take at random any ten or twelve of the more re-

cent companies with and without stars, and compare the ensemble performances of those containing stars with the performances of those minus stars. On the star side take, for instance, "Tiger! Tiger!" "The Saving Grace," "A Successful Calamity," "Why Marry," "The Very Minute," "Redemption," "The Copperhead," "Mr. Lazarus," "Kismet," "Madame Sand," "Getting Married" and "A Marriage of Convenience." And on the non-star side, for example, "Three Wise Fools," "Daddies," "The Gypsy Trail," "Hush," "A Little Journey," "Polly With a Past," "Magic," "The Betrothal," "The Devil's Garden," "The Happy Ending," "Toby's Bow" and "The Invisible Foe." Compare the one side with the other and cast your vote, a vote that will assuredly go to the star productions and one that will be all the more confirmatory since a fair number of productions in both lists were made by the same directors and since, further, a number of the productions listed on the star side were purposely selected for the comparatively mediocre quality of the stars who appeared in them. Thus, unless I am greatly mistaken in your ballot, one discovers that the weakness in ensemble acting, where it exists, has often less to do with the star system than with the director responsible for the production.



The second characteristic assumption is that the system, as we have it, is an evil since it is in the occasional habit of elevating to stardom young women whose histrionic virtuosity is alleged to be confined principally either to a pretty face or to an openness to managerial amour that amounts almost to Southern hospitality—or to both. This assumption seems to me to wear two false-faces. In the first place, to argue that the star system is intrinsically an evil because certain of the young lady stars it has manufactured are neither actresses nor virgins, is, as I see it, of a piece with arguing that the non-star system is intrinsically an evil because certain of its male performers are neither actors nor satyrs. And in the second place, to believe that it is improbable that a young woman may be possessed simultaneously of a talent for concubinage and for acting is to bring into the argument a morality as alien to an appraisal of histrionic skill as it is to an appraisal of literature. The simple truth, of course, is that in America, as well as in England, and, more especially, on the Continent, a number of the most proficient actresses of the present years—to say nothing of the past—have been graduated to their estate of granted proficiency out of managerial embraces.

To object to the American star system as a

menace to acting and drama on the ground that it occasionally (as within the last few months) pops into stardom a talentless young woman who achieves star eminence for herself by the simple means of putting up half the money for the show or a talentless actor who illuminates Broadway with his name in Matkowsky capitals by laying out twelve thousand dollars is to object to American book publishing as a menace to art and literature on the ground that it occasionally (as within the last few months) pops into absurd prominence by means of extravagant newspaper and book-jacket advertising a talentless young man who pays for his own book and writes personally the high praise of himself or an equally talentless young woman who does likewise. The star system, at bottom, is a sound and serviceable, a logical and natural, institution. And its frequent abuse may—as I see it—no more be brought as an argument against its fundamental worth, validity and integrity than the frequent abuse of the eyes may be brought as an argument against the practice of reading. The star system has proved itself of undeniably sound commercial design—and whatever brings the theatre to prosper must in the end, though the end be far off, be viewed with critical satisfaction. And if on the more relevant side of artistic design

the star system has been not always quite so uniformly successful, its measure of comparative artistic success has at least outweighed its measure of comparative artistic failure. Regarded from any plane of criticism higher than that from which one appraises the art of the Sells Brothers, the art of even the best actor is of course approximately as authentic an art as that practiced by Duveen, Knoedler or any other such merchant in the retailing of masterpieces. But estimating it merely for what it is, what it stands for, and what it seeks to accomplish, the star system, for all its absurdity, is as valuable to the theatre as a pocketful of iron crosses and *croix de guerre* is to the general of an army: it is a spur to effort, a teaser to glory, a something to transfix the gaze of the great crowd on the line of parade.

Mr. Thomas A. Wise is, in sound criticism, a not particularly able actor, yet as a star his Falstaff is an immeasurably better Falstaff than that of Wilhelm Diegelmann, who, because he is not starred in Germany, gives the native professors an excuse to declaim omnisciently against the American star system. Madame Nazimova is similarly a not particularly illustrious actress, yet as a star her Ibsen performances are immeasurably better than those of Ida Wüst, of Brahm's

famous Lessing-Theater company, who—not being starred in Germany—provides the local Brunetières with still another excuse. Come down the list a bit, and you will find analogously that such a local and artistically debatable star as Ruth Chatterton is, though debatable, yet possessed of an actually greater skill than such a French non-star as the Mlle. Sylvie who plays in Paris the same kind of parts that the Chatterton plays in New York. And the same thing holds true in the cases of Billie Burke and Marthe Regnier. If Desjardins isn't starred in France and Henry Dixey is starred in America, it is, quite properly, because Dixey is really the better and more deserving actor. And if Brulé isn't starred in France and William Gillette is starred in America in the same kind of rôles, it is similarly because Gillette, being the more effective performer, deserves to be starred.

### § 31

*The American Negro.*—It is one of the commonest delusions that the American negro is by nature a musical fellow. The truth, of course, is that he is not at all musical, but rather merely rhythmical. He has an acute feeling for rhythm,

but of music he knows nothing. It is, indeed, as rare to find a black American who knows anything about music as it is to find a white American. . . . The negro, with his unusual sense of rhythm, is no more accurately to be called musical than a metronome is to be called a Swiss music-box.

### § 32

*The Shaw Imitation.*—The average imitator of Shaw appears to believe that the best way to write a Shaw play is first to write one's own play and then—without changing a line of dialogue—by transferring the names of the male characters to the women characters and vice versa, to put the male sentiments in the women's mouths and the women's ideas in the men's; and, this done, to cause one character to quote Schopenhauer and then bring into debate with that character another character who contrives to floor him with a wheeze of W. S. Gilbert, soberly expounded.

The fault of Shaw's imitators is that they are successful in imitating Shaw's garrulity without being successful in imitating the substance of Shaw's garrulity. Anyone can easily and successfully imitate a dramatist such, for instance, as Henri Kistemaekers, since the latter is merely ver-

bose in a hollow, empty way; but it is another thing to imitate with any degree of closeness an agile writer like Shaw. For the more closely a writer imitates Shaw, the more apparent becomes the wide difference between them. In example, where a more successful imitator of Shaw than Wedekind, or Ilgenstein, or Otto Soyka, or Freksa, or Gustav Wied—and where figures more distant each in turn from the original? Or, to turn to Shaw himself, where a closer imitator (in “The Philanderer”) of the Arno Holz attitude in “Die Sozialaristokraten”—yet where two men farther apart?

## § 33

*On Drama and Acting.*—Drama is the art of expressing artificially what is felt naturally. Acting, the art of expressing naturally what is felt artificially.

## § 34

*Subterfuge.*—It is the common custom of the playwright who is desirous of exhibiting himself in the light of a brilliant philosopher but who is unable to think up anything brilliant to say, to resort to the theatrical trick of trying to confound criticism by putting the very best things he is able

to think of in the mouth of his hero and then, upon their being spoken by the hero, causing another character to observe that the aforesaid hero talks like a sophomore.

## § 35

*War, Peace and the Drama.*—Why a great war should nine times in ten inspire the contemporaneous theatre to little more than the composition of trivial Phillips Oppenheim-Anna Katherine Green fables must be explained by the same person who can tell why a great historical figure should nine times in ten generally inspire the theatre to little more than washboiler melodrama (Lincoln in "The Ensign"), chasings after scraps of paper ("Colonel Cromwell"), and superintendings of ingénue amours ("Disraeli"): The war, or military, play of respectable quality is born not of war, but of peace. Where peace gives birth to a Galsworthy's "The Mob" in England, war gives birth only to spy-plot pot-boilers like "The Man with the Club Foot" and "The Live Wire." Where peace gives birth to Von Beyerlein's "Taps" in Germany, war gives birth only to the same kind of spy-plot pot-boilers on the stages to the north and south of the Rosetheater. And for one peacetime "L'Aiglon" in France, war breeds nothing but

countless spy yellow-backs like "Alsace," just as for one peace-time Roda Roda's "Feldherrnhügel" in Austria, war belches forth nothing but trash of the accent of Flamm's "Soldier's Child."

## § 36

*The Critical Stricture.*—That the wildest improbability may be taken for the postulate of a play is a theory which regularly projects the majority of our critics into something of a sweat. They charge the air with gaudy dicta on the unity of this or that, on the holding up of the mirror, on the quality of reasonability in the initial premise and on many other such whim-whams about which the person seeking amusement in a theatre gives not a continental. Forgetting, as has often been pointed out, that, from four hundred and sixty-eight years before the birth of Christ—when the most successful play of the day ("Ædipus Rex") showed its audience a hero who, when he came on the stage, had been married for twelve years to his own mother, who, in turn, throughout all that time had never had a talk with him on the past which might have given him any suspicion of her indenty or of the fact that he had murdered his own father—down to the present time, when one of the suc-



cessful plays of the day ("Justice") thoroughly convinces its New York audiences of its local applicability despite its New York audiences' non-recognition of section 887 of the Penal Law and section 2,188 of the Penal Code, which make the play, from the local and native point of view, ridiculous—forgetting, as I say, that improbability has utterly nothing to do with a play's chances for success and effectiveness, whether commercially or artistically.

One of the most recent plays to come in for such strictures is—a farce, to boot, mind—the "Good Gracious Annabelle" of Clare Kummer, a deliberately fantastic affair designed only, by a wild discharge of artless humours, to jabberwock its auditors and give them a bit of careless fun in the playhouse. These strictures are not difficult to expect, since they are ever vouchsafed us by the professors when a piece slightly different from the general is brought to the community's attention. They appeared in full force, it is interesting to recall, when twenty-seven years ago "Paris Fin de Siècle" was charming the French capital and when "The Cabinet Minister" was crowding the theatres of the British. And the critical strictures were in these instances largely of a piece with the critical strictures more recently visited upon the entertain-

ing play by Miss Kummer. To object, as objection is made, to the antic unreality of Miss Kummer's little play, is to object to the final scene of Augier's "*Le Gendre de M. Poirier*"—the best scene in the play and probably Augier's best fragment of dramatic composition. Another recent play, "*Come Out of the Kitchen*," by A. E. Thomas out of a novel by somebody or other, concerns itself with a story the same as that employed by Miss Kummer. And this same story it handles with a precise regard for all those rule-books of technic so close to the fancy of the grave and literal-minded critic. And the result? The play is not only not one-tenth so amusing as Miss Kummer's play, but, into the bargain, it is a substantial fact that—so far as the story goes—"Come Out of the Kitchen" actually isn't one-half so convincing as the latter! Mr. Thomas elects to treat the fable of the aristocrat turned servant as rational comedy; Miss Kummer elects to treat it as moonstruck farce. The theatrical value of the latter approach must be at once patent. By initially assuring the audience that the theme is quite absurd, Miss Kummer needs only, to achieve success, concern herself with making her spectators laugh. To the contrary, by initially assuring the audience that the theme is a semi-serious one, Mr.

Thomas (being no Oliver Goldsmith) is compelled through the rest of the evening not only to devise ways and means to amuse his spectators, but in addition must waste a considerable and valuable portion of his allotted two hours in persuading his audience periodically of the reasonability of his characters and his characters' actions. The difference 'twixt the two entertainments is, therefore, the usual difference 'twixt local comedy and farce. The former is more often than not merely the latter without a sense of humour.

Again, contrary to the prevalent critical notion that Miss Kummer's plays are (I quote the gazettes) "diffuse," "formless," "loosely and carelessly knit" and "of an irresponsible and slipshod technique," the truth is that for all their surface appearance of formlessness and technical infelicity they actually follow a very definite and symmetrical design. To say that the plays would be better plays were they of a more symmetrical construction is arbitrarily to say that the straight street of a city is a more lovely place to linger in than a crooked country lane. Miss Kummer's plays, if the word formlessness must be used, are formless not in the sense that a bad piece of literature is formless, but in the sense that a good

piece of literature—the “Professor Bernhardt” of Schnitzler, say, or the “Weavers” of Hauptmann, or the “Peter Pan” of Barrie, or the “Pasteur” of Sacha Guitry, or, to descend in the scale, one or two of the farces of Hoyt—is formless. Formlessness is frequently not a fault, but a virtue of rich blossom. Consider, in fine, Strindberg’s “Dream Play” . . . Chopin’s sonata in B flat minor . . . the poetry of Yeats. . . . The work of Miss Kummer, if it lacks technique, lacks technique in the sense that a little child dancing merrily to a spring-time hurdy-gurdy lacks it—and, contrariwise, in the sense that Gertrude Hoffmann possesses it.

Not less ridiculous than these criticisms of Miss Kummer’s work are the majority of criticisms directed against Langdon Mitchell’s dramatization of Thackeray’s novel, “Pendennis.” It has been made the subject of vigorous critical objection that Mr. Mitchell has, in his dramatization of the novel, omitted all drama. Which, in view of the circumstance that in the novel itself there is no drama (i. e., drama of the spasm sort that physics pleasurably what Thackeray himself was fond of alluding to as “that great baby, the public”), seems just a trifle like lamenting that Rostand, in preparing the story of Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac for the stage, did not make the play more romantic

for Coquelin's and Mr. Mansfield's lady admirers by giving Cyrano a more lovely nose.

To object to a dramatization of "Pendennis" is an objection truly not without a measure of common sense. But to object to an undramatic dramatization of "Pendennis" is to object to Paderewski because he doesn't play the violin. Mr. Mitchell's purpose was to lift Thackeray onto the stage. It was apparently Mr. Mitchell's critics' desire that he lift the stage onto Thackeray. The notion that the stage, then, is not the place for an undramatic story such as this, is the sort of notion that would bar from the theatre all manuscripts like "Anatol" and "Patriots" and welcome in their stead chiefly such as "The Queen of the Opium Ring" and "The Witching Hour."

### § 37

*The Actor Play.*—An actor views a play not in terms of composite drama, but in terms of its individual rôles. It is consequently not unnatural that we find that when an actor composes a play for his own use he more often than not writes a luxuriant part for himself and completely forgets to write a play around the part. When an actor attempts the negotiation of satire, an especial marasmus is on the world. Actors have written

successful drama, comedy, burlesque, farce—but satire, the edelweiss of literature, has generally been far above their reach.

### § 38

*The Drama of Augustus Thomas.*—The drama of Augustus Thomas is the condensation of the protagonist's lifetime into two hours and the expansion of the theatregoer's two hours into a lifetime. The so-called technique of this playwright is so perfect that it completely obscures his drama. Every exit and entrance, every *pince-nez* that is to be broken at a critical moment, every bandage that is to be found germ-infected and bring about a character's death, is planted with a so thorough assiduity that, once the first half of the preparation is done with, nothing remains but to hang around and watch the plants work. True, pastime may be found the while in giving ear to such of the playwright's tony Broadwayisms as "the chemistry of motivation," "the chemistry of things spiritual," and the like, and to his seriously intended love scenes wherein the hero informs the heroine, in voice a-thrill with fervour, that she is "an angelic, delectable baby" (the quotation—from "Rio Grande"—is literal!), yet in the main the evening

reveals itself as a mere lecture by Thomas on "How To Write A Play," a laboratorial evening proving to the further satisfaction of the students of Professor George Pierce Baker that, with protracted schooling and practice, one may become sufficiently proficient in what is termed dramatic technique to write anything for the stage but drama.

### § 39

*Sentiment and Avoirdupois.*—It is probable that the refractorily comic aspect of many a playwright's sentimental work is often heightened by the experienced lady to whom the playwright's producer entrusts the leading rôle. The lady—so one on such occasions generally reads in the enthusiastic reviews of the play—"is possessed of no small histrionic skill" and, after witnessing her performance, one is disposed emphatically to agree. For so great, indeed, is generally the lady's histrionic skill that once she sits upon it during a sentimental floor scene she is unable subsequently to get to her feet again without the robust aid of the leading man.

Sentiment demands slenderness. The moment sentiment weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds, it becomes comedy; the moment it touches

one hundred and thirty-six, it becomes farce; the moment it touches one hundred and forty, it becomes burlesque. The best piece of criticism ever set to paper in this regard was written by the late Charles H. Hoyt when he was the dramatic critic of the *Boston Herald*. He wrote it after witnessing the performance, in a sentimental rôle, of Miss Lily Langtry. And this one piece of criticism doubtless did more for the future American drama than any thousand pieces of criticism written previously or since. The day it appeared Hoyt was promptly discharged—and became a playwright.

#### § 40

*The Religious Play.*—Since the average New York audience is usually made up for the most part of Jews, a religious or racial play that abstains from an excessive adulation of Jewry is predestined to failure. Such a play stands small chance of financial success unless it brings down its big curtain on a rosy piece of verbal fireworks in which Jesus Christ, Disraeli and Jacob Schiff are proclaimed as belonging to the same race, and unless it brings down its final curtain with the discovery that not Milton Rosenbaum, but the low Patrick McCarthy, was the man who actually stole the



money. Any variation of the theme is bound to offend the tender sensibilities of the theatregoing Anglo-Oriental. And, further, any variation is bound to come in for gamy cracks at the hands of the newspaper play reviewers, since an enthusiastic record of a play that handles the racial question without thick gloves would not be likely to drive crazy with joy the Messrs. Gimbel, Altman, Saks, Stern, Greenhut, Abraham & Straus, and the rest of the full-page advertisers.

This attitude on the part of audience and reviewer is instrumental in producing a hundred "Melting Pots" and "Little Brothers" for one "Consequences," a hundred "Houses Next Door" and "Five Frankfurters" for one play like "The Gentile Wife," a hundred fountains of hypocritical pulvil for one decent piece of writing that ventures to look upon its subject matter intelligently, calmly, decently and fairly. . . . Our popular theatre, however, is a bizarre institution in any direction when its stage is occupied with a religious question—whether that question be Christian, Jew or Buddhist. It sees nothing profane or blasphemous in presenting the Saviour as a sizzling spotlight ("Ben Hur") or as the inventor of a death-dealing submarine (in the motion picture "Civilization") or as an uncouth actor ("The Servant in the House"), yet

it shrinks—particularly in its Mosaic managerial departments—from such reverent and gentle and very beautiful things as Brieux's "Faith" and Andreyev's "Savva." The obvious sacrilege of such mossback diddlers as "The Terrible Meek" and "Marie-Odile"—exhibitions of evil taste aimed directly at the box-office—it hearkens to in awe and in devout silence. It views a team of asthmatic nags toting a papier-maché chariot over a treadmill or a baby spotlight halo-ing a scheduled ingénue or a number of stagehands mimicking the roars of hungry lions as an exalting religious spectacle, while it the meanwhile is somewhat puzzled as how to conduct its feelings and attitudes toward such a presentation as Shaw's "Androcles". . . . Religion, so far as the theatre is concerned, is much like a cigar. A cigar, however good, is not palatable when smoked in the brilliant sunlight. A religious theme, however sound, is distasteful when aired in the brilliant glare of the footlights.

## § 41

*La Voix d'Or.*—That a rich low speaking voice generally bespeaks generations of cultural breeding and background is one of the commonest of American-held social and critical fallacies. The

so-called rich low speaking voice is found in America to be regularly less the inheritance of aristocracy than the inheritance of an engagement in "The Lady of Lyons," a medical specialization in women's diseases or a waiting on table in a first-class restaurant. The speaking voice of Mrs. Astor is infinitely less "aristocratic" than that of a third-rate Broadway actress. The speaking voice of Hamilton Fish, compared with that of a Ritz headwaiter, sounds like a foghorn.

### § 42

*Plays of Caste.*—It is the general contention of American critics of the drama that a play whose theme relates to British class prejudice and seeks to exhibit the results of an amorous collision of caste and proletariat cannot possibly succeed in interesting American audiences since—I quote the common observation—"in this country there is no such thing as caste," etc. Such critical flag-wagging is the veriest gibberish. Not only, of course, is there quite as much class distinction in this country as in England—if, indeed, not vastly more—but, what is more directly to the point, plays with precisely the same basic theme have regularly succeeded in interesting American audiences. The

eternal "Iron Master" (with perhaps its American derivative "The Boss"), "The Lost Paradise," "Old Heidelberg," "Trelawney," . . . the innumerable native plays wherein the family of wealth and position opposes its son's marriage to a poor working girl or its daughter's marriage to a young commoner . . . all are intrinsically of the class versus mass posture. The Lords and Ladies of Tom Robertson and the Misters and Missuses of Owen Davis (*vide* "Forever After," which played an entire season in New York alone) are brothers and sisters under their skins.

### § 43

*The Protean Play.*—That a four-act play of the nature, for example, of "Under Orders," acted in its entirety by a cast composed of but two players, is interesting is not to be denied. But that the quality of interest aroused is precisely akin to that aroused by a man playing a banjo with his toes—and that, incidentally, the quality of the resulting drama is of a piece with the quality of the resulting music—is to be denied no less. Such a play is to drama very largely what the vaudeville mind-readers named the Zanzigs are to Sigmund Freud. Just as with the Zanzigs a member of the audience is

pricked up vastly less by being told that what he is holding in his hand is a plumber's license than by guessing how the Zanzigs did it, so with a play of this kind is a member of the audience made curious much less by the progress of the drama than by speculating how two lone actors are going to further the progress of that drama. That the playwright in such an instance writes a play for two actors less than he writes two actors for a play is, of course, obvious. And while it is readily to be allowed that he may maneuver his trick dexterously, the fact remains that all that remains is this trick. And a trick, alas, is no more profound drama than pulling goldfish out of an ink-well is deep-sea fishing.

#### § 44

*On Aesthetic Dancing.*—The numerous schools and cults of aesthetic dancing, interior and al fresco, are doubtless grounded less on the honest desire to make a beautiful art of the dance than on the Freudian desire of unwanted vestals to play indirectly, yet satisfactorily, with the masculine passions. A bevy of women running half naked around Central Park is not nearly so intent upon enthroning Terpsichore in her niche in the temple of the *beaux arts* as upon watching the effect on the

park policeman out of the corners of its eyes. The unloved woman with legs gnarled and knotted like a rustic bench, galloping across the grass plots in a sheet and a diaper, thus takes out her sinister revenge. No women half-way admired by men, and loved by men, go in for undressing in public, whatever the artistic purport of their intentions, save possibly upon the stage. The moment a woman runs around Pelham in the daylight clad only in a bed sheet, under the dubious impression that she is Psyche in the Arcadian Wood, that moment is it certain that she has reached the conclusion that her charms are unavailing against the fortress that is man. The schools and cults of æsthetic dancing are filled with left-overs, wall-flowers. These schools and cults are to art what the Japanese punk stick is to an old maids' tea-room.

## § 45

*W. Somerset Maugham.*—It is one of the characteristics of W. Somerset Maugham's so-called epigrammatic comedies—so painstaking and obvious are the author's plants and cues for bright lines—that one knows in advance precisely what his characters are going to say and that one then finds that what one thought they were going to

say is much brighter than what they really do say. For example, when in his play, "Caroline," his elderly and already somewhat skeptic lovers, discussing prosaically their forthcoming wedded life, suddenly begin quarreling over their union, one knows that what will follow will be the man's conciliatory "There, there, dear Caroline; let us look on our coming marriage merely as a disagreement to agree." But what actually follows is the man's "Let's not quarrel now, Caroline; we will have plenty of time to quarrel *after* we're married"—a line favourite of every team of gas-house comedians in the small-time vaudeilles. And so it goes. That there is a certain graceful quality to Maugham's writing, that he writes a more engaging English than the majority of quill-drivers who contribute to the stage of our own country, is a matter scarcely open to question. But that he is a wit or a writer possessed of even a facile cleverness is a thing of another colour. The American newspaper comparison of his play, "Caroline," with the comedies of Oscar Wilde is surely a something to jounce the humours. In all of the play, from beginning to end, there isn't one-tenth the wit of the American Tom Barry's "Upstart" which was ridiculed out of court by the daily gazettes after a few performances several years ago in the

Maxine Elliott Theatre, one twentieth the wit of the American George Bronson Howard's "Snobs" which suffered a like fate at the Hudson Theatre—or one-fiftieth the wit of Mencken's recent brew of speculations enclosed between the covers of "A Little Book in C Major." If you are one to doubt, compare Maugham's "Marriage doesn't change a woman much. She remains just the same, only more so," with Mencken's "The charm of a man is measured by the charm of the women who think that he is a scoundrel." Or Maugham's "Men don't want to marry. It's not their nature. You have to give them a little push or you'll never bring them to it," with Mencken's "How little it takes to make life perfect! A good sauce, a cocktail after a hard day, a girl who kisses with her mouth half open!" Or Maugham's "Women make such a distinction between the truth and the true truth" with Mencken's "Since Shakespeare's day more than a thousand different actors have played Hamlet. No wonder he is crazy!" Or the former's "It is in railway stations that a man shows his superiority to a woman" with the latter's "The one unanswerable objection to Christianity is that the God it asks us to worship, if the descriptions of its official spokesmen are to be believed, is a vastly less venerable personage than Ludwig van Beethoven." Or



the former's "Nothing is so pleasant as to think of the sacrifices one will never have to make" with the latter's "When a husband's story is believed, he begins to suspect his wife."

But I prove here what is already perfectly known. Maugham is merely a pretty juggler of pretty words who blithesomely tosses them aloft and lets them fall about him in indiscriminate, pretty little piles that have plenty of cake-frosting but little meaning and less humour.

#### § 46

*The Risqué Britisher.*—It is, generally, as difficult for an English playwright to be adroitly risqué as it is for a married woman. The Britisher who essays to write an adroitly risqué little play is most often as light and devilish as a German dancing the tango. With the exception of Pinero's "Wife Without a Smile" I am unable to summon to mind a single modishly naughty British play possessed of that delicate touch so imperatively necessary to such affairs. No sooner does the British author affect a momentary mood of wickedness than he becomes nervously frantic immediately the moment is over with to explain at great and serious length that what went before was intrinsically impeccable from any angle of morality from which his audi-

ence may have elected to regard it. The moment a bashful *double entente* peeks furtively around the corner of the proscenium arch, out dashes the playwright armed with swabbing instruments and antitoxins. The evening, in brief, amounts to three acts of apology interrupted at intervals by pseudo-compromising situations of the sort that go to make up the violent serials in the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

## § 47

*Vaudeville*.—Vaudeville is a species of entertainment derived from the dregs of drama and musical comedy assembled in such wise that they shall appeal to the dregs of drama and musical comedy audiences.

## § 48

*Two Celebrated American Character Actors*.—It is claimed by many of my colleagues that George Arliss is America's most expert character actor. And indeed, by this time, he should be. For he has been acting that character for longer than I am able to remember. True enough, now the character has been named Zakkuri ("The Darling of the Gods"), now the Devil, and now Disraeli (in the plays so titled), now again Paganini and now still

again Hamilton (in the plays so called), but whatever the designation, Mr. Arliss' interpretation of the character is ever the same. The slit-eyed peer, the nervous hands, the velvet tread, the Ralph Herz delivery—they never vary. The difference between Mr. Arliss' Disraeli and Paganini, as the difference between his Zakkuri and his Devil, is merely a matter of make-up. A pleasant actor the man is; but a versatile actor, or an actor possessed of very real skill, certainly not. Otis Skinner, like Arliss, is also a one-part actor. His characterizations vary only in the tint of grease-paint with which he colours his face. The difference between his Anthony Bellchamber, English actor, and his Antonio Camaradonio, Italian organ-grinder, for example, is but the difference between Hess' No. 9 (healthy pink) and a grayish wig and Hess' No. 12 (healthy olive) and a black wig. Otherwise, all is as one: the flourish of gesture, the cocking of the eye, the slap upon the expanded chest, the elevation of the right shoulder, the hat upon one ear, the running of the scale with the speaking voice, the posture debonnaire, the backs of the palms supporting the chin, and the smiling of the whimsical smile. . . . Whatever the rôle, the same bag of tricks. Mr. Skinner never gets deeper into the soul of the character he is playing than that soul is re-

vealed to him in his dressing-room mirror. His Italian organ-grinder is less an Italian organ-grinder than an imitation of the late Maurice Farkoa in a yellow sash.

### § 49

*The Journalistic Hazlitttry.*—Not less interesting than Dunsany's "The Laughter of the Gods" were the journalistic critical performances visited upon the work and its author on the occasion of the play's initial revealment in the United States. By way of assessing the kidney of criticism to which a playwright is subjected at the hands of New York journalism, let us undertake the completely bootless business of criticizing one of the representative and typical criticisms confected on this especial occasion—the criticism in point being that of Mr. J. Ranken Towse, of the *Evening Post*, the dean of metropolitan journalistic play reviewers. An excerpt from this critical estimate will serve. Thus, then, this Mr. Towse:

"A close, critical scrutiny of the play reveals some obvious weaknesses. In the first place, it is certain that when an argument or a meaning is intended the exposition of it should be clear. In this particular case, for instance, in which supernaturalism (whether Pagan or otherwise is immaterial) supplies the energy of the whole

dramatic scheme, the spectators ought to be left in no doubt as to whether or not it is held up to ridicule. Yet this is the condition in which a good many of them must have found themselves the other evening if it occurred to them to think at all. It is not probable that Lord Dunsany deliberately set to work to puzzle his audience with conundrums, but he has proposed several. At whom or at what were the gods laughing? At the jocose slaughter of a court which had refused to credit a prophecy which they had themselves suborned or at the priest whose lie they converted into a true and seemingly inspired prediction? Or did the priest willingly deceive his blackmailers by pretending that he was lying when he knew that he was speaking the truth? Or was he trying at the last to undo the mischief for which he was mainly responsible?"

In the first place, the observation that "It is certain that when an argument or a meaning is intended the exposition of it should be clear. In this particular case, for instance, in which supernaturalism . . . supplies the energy of the whole dramatic scheme, the spectators ought to be left in no doubt as to whether or not it is held up to ridicule," etc.

In the first place as to this in-the-first-place, why should it be desirable that the spectators be left in no doubt as to whether the supernaturalism in point is or is not held up to ridicule? Even grant-

ing that some sort of argument or meaning is intended which—as Dunsany explicitly stated in an article quoted in the *Evening Post*, among other papers—is not the case. This leaving of the spectators in doubt is the very element that makes the play the notably impressive thing it is. Chesterton has worked the same trick in “Magic.” Brieux has done largely the same thing in “La Foi.” Ibsen, if we are to listen to the opinions of Catulle Mendès, Ahlberg, Jaeger and Georg Brandes, did much the same in his “Comedy of Love.” The spectators at Ibsen’s “Wild Duck” are left in doubt as to where the thematic ridicule of satire ceases and the bite of tragedy begins, and vice versa. And so on without end.

“It is not probable that Dunsany deliberately set to work to puzzle his audience with conundrums, but he has proposed several,” continues the reviewer,—and proceeds to enumerate.

Dunsany—despite the reviewer—deliberately set to work to do just that. If intrinsic proof be needed, we have his published word for it. But to this outside word it is not necessary to look. “The Laughter of the Gods,” plainly enough, is deliberately a conundrum play—as “The Lady or the Tiger” was deliberately a conundrum story and as “Mr. Lazarus” and the “The Thirteenth

Chair" were deliberately conundrum plays. Or, on a higher level, as Schnitzler's "Bernhardi" and Bahr's "Principle" and Galsworthy's "Strife" are, in one sense, deliberately conundrum plays and as, in another, are Shaw's "Getting Married" and —by stretching a point—Dunsany's own "Glittering Gate." The thematic conundrum of "The Laughter of the Gods" puzzles Dunsany's audience for the very simple reason that it also puzzles Dunsany. And being an artist, Dunsany has none of the hack's wish arbitrarily to answer what is intrinsically an unanswerable riddle merely that his play may be the more toothsome to the yokel appetite for "endings." This childish desire to have everything explained, proved, settled, sealed and labelled is the invariable itch of the What's-Inside-the-Doll school of journalistic criticism to which this Mr. Towse is a typical doctor. Of the inscrutable mysteries and riddles of the universe, the meaninglessness in the circlings of the globe and of what transpires on it and above it and below it, this criticism and its devotees demand a facile and satisfactory solution. That the great artists of the world, from Shakespeare and Beethoven to Hauptmann and Anatole France and from Ibsen and Balzac to Synge and Gorky and Conrad, have been baffled in the face of the rid-

dles means less to the Towses than that the Charles Kleins and Charles Rann Kennedys have always been quick to find soothing answers.

The utter fatuity of such criticism is to be perceived in the questions which the reviewer would have Dunsany and his work answer and which, being not answered, greatly, in the reviewer's estimation, weaken the play.

"At whom or at what were the gods laughing?" the curious Towse demands to know. Or again—

"Did the priest willingly deceive his blackmailers by pretending that he was lying when he knew that he was speaking the truth?" Or again—

"Was he trying at the last to undo the mischief for which he was mainly responsible?"

Following an analogous train of critical reasoning, the good Towse might readily find fault with "The Master Builder" (as, sure enough, did Professor Frank Wadleigh Chandler, of one of the numerous jitney Oxfords of the Middle West) because Ibsen has failed clearly to answer for the Professor such questions (I quote the genial Professor, who calls them "enigmas") as:

1. "Is Hilda a woman, like Hedda, or is she a mere imaginative child?"
2. "Is Hilda the youthful aspiration of Solness re-



turned to him in later life? If so, his death is a triumph, not a tragedy!"

3. "Or, again, is Hilda, as his embodied aspiration, a futile force? If so, the play is a tragedy!"

And, similarly and quite as relevantly, might the good Towse find fault with Beethoven's Fifth on the ground that it does not satisfactorily answer for him such conundrums as why does a chicken cross the road, how old is Ed Wynn, and how soon will William Jennings Bryan die.

"The Laughter of the Gods," though considerably inferior to "The Gods of the Mountain," is a finely imaginative and compelling derisory satire. It brings one to wonder, once again, why no one has thus far looked to Dunsany for grand opera material. What librettos his plays would make!

## § 50

*True Sentiment and False.*—Every once in so often some playwright addresses himself to achieve again the spirit and romance of Meyer-Förster's "Old Heidelberg," and every once in so often the tilter comes unhorsed from the tourney. The sentiment of "Old Heidelberg" was brewed out of an understanding of life and out of an understanding of literary composition sufficient to translate

that understanding of life to the stage. It was not, like its imitations, a thing brewed rather out of a misunderstanding of life and out of an understanding of the showshop sufficient to translate that misunderstanding of life to the stage. Sentiment is not to be projected through the proscenium arch by a mere set representing a flower garden, a dimming of the border lights, and Ethelbert Nevin on an off-stage violin.

§ 51

*Personality and the Actor.*—On the vexed subject of personality and actor, one of my colleagues—a young man given to a profound admiration of the cosmetic art—has written: “Our critics always have been a little bewildered by personality. When they come upon a personality as vivid as Mrs. Fiske’s or Maude Adams’, or Mr. Mansfield’s—where it is recognizable as a common factor of all the artist’s performances—we are sure to have some wearisome paragraphs of protest from those who are wont to confuse the art of acting with the art of disguise. It is a little as though a music lover might regret that, while Caruso was pleasing enough in his way, he always sang tenor.” My young friend’s employment of the word “art” to designate the craft of putty noses and false whisk-

ers should be a sufficient answer to his notion as to the place of personality in the sun of the foot-lights. Yet his contention is so nicely representative of the opinion of the professional layman that one may be forgiven for plumbing it a little further.

In the first place, let us set down that personality is a matter of major importance to an actor: that personality is nine points in the histrionic law. To this, doubtless, every cool eye agrees. Therefore, since personality is nine points in the histrionic law, it must follow that, in an appraisal of the histrionic *esthetik*, art is but one point. Can one picture, for example, Mrs. Fiske's "art" apart from her physical tricks and peculiarities of personality? And if so, what is the bulk of the "art" that remains? Lazaro's art remains art on the phonograph record. Imagine Mansfield's "Cyrano" on the Victrola! Would it be Mansfield's art or Edmond Rostand's that the machine reproduced? The notion that a bad actor reciting Shakespeare is merely an actor, but that a good actor reciting Shakespeare is an artist, is akin to the notion that Shakespeare in paper covers is a lesser artist than Shakespeare in morocco. Take Brieux's personality from "Les Hanneçons" (there is none of the man's generally accepted and recognized

“personality” in the work), and a work of art still remains. Take Maude Adams’ personality from her Peter Pan—and what is left but J. M. Barrie?

When H. G. Wells wrote “Tono-Bungay,” he was proclaimed, and properly, an artist. But if H. G. Wells were to write “Tono-Bungay” every year, without variety, without change, would it be justifiable every year to proclaim him an artist of increasing rank? Or Rodin; if, every year, he repeated his “Hand of God”? Yet year on year our so-called actor artists repeat themselves, without variety, without change, without diversity—for all the world as if they were dwelling still in those distant days when first the heated young journalists of the epoch proclaimed them artists. Mrs. Fiske’s “Erstwhile Susan” is Mrs. Fiske’s “Mrs. Bumpstead-Leigh,” just as Mrs. Fiske’s “Mrs. Bumpstead-Leigh” is Mrs. Fiske’s “High Road” and “Servir.” Bernard Shaw’s “Man and Superman” is not Bernard Shaw’s “Cæsar and Cleopatra”; Brahms’ piano-concerto in D minor is not Brahms’ piano-concerto in B flat major. In a word, the so-called art of acting has become, in its final deduction, most often but the sustained art of acting and re-acting a single rôle: the revolving disc of the portrayal of a rôle that once captivated the crowd. That is, a successful catering to the mob. Hence,

mere salesmanship. Hence—save in a few signal instances—something scarcely compatible with authentic art.

As to my young friend's supplementary criticism: "It is a little as though a music lover might regret that, while Caruso was pleasing enough in his way, he always sang tenor." The obvious retort would seem to be, "It is a little as though a music lover might regret that, while Caruso was pleasing enough in his way, he always—while singing tenor—distracted one with periodic bizarre movements of his ombbligo."

Nothing, as agreed, is so important to an actor as personality; yet nothing so instantly bounds his capacity and versatility. The actor with a marked personality—and here even a very great actor like Salvini is found no exception to the rule—is as a Corot upon whose palette there is an unconsonant carmine which is forever getting vexatiously into his brushes. A dryness of voice in the limpid lines of Romeo; a staccato utterance in the soft lips of a *Princesse Lointaine*; an uncontrollable neck twist in the tender passages of *Hannele*; an indelibly characteristic semi-grunt in the great silences of *Cyrano*—these are the defects of personality that tear fine moments of the stage into a thousand tatters. To be effective, acting must interpret not so much the

playwright's work as the audience's silent criticism of that work. The actor who is most successful is he who thinks less with his own mind than with the mind of the theatregoing mob. And this is why the thoughtful lover of drama, the person who elects to use his own mind, has recently taken himself in such large numbers to the printed play. He appreciates the fact that a comfortable chair under a reading lamp is the only place for worthwhile drama. And if, in sooth, you are one to disagree with this man's notion and seriously contend that good plays should be acted in the theatre—that the stage is the proper place for them—tell me what you think would happen to Hauptmann's great Silesian play if, in the tremendous climax to the fifth act, the child actress playing Mielchen were accidentally to drop her panties? Or, again, what would befall the superb art of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" if you were to see it played by a Romeo who chanced unhappily to be seized with the hiccoughs?

## § 52

*Double Entente.*—A theatrical piece by such representative American virtuosi of thin ice as Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Hatton ever suggests a French

play written in Chicago. Invariably selecting themes distinctly Gallic, the Hattons with equal regularity select treatments distinctly galline. That this selection of treatment is, however, involuntary, that it proceeds automatically from the collaborators' shortcomings, is apparent to anyone who has passed an eye over their various labours. Breathlessly pursuing the elusive *double entente* and attempting a flying leap to the step of its caboose, the Hattons are forever missing and landing with a loud bump upon their joint sit-spot. But such is the patent unshakable determination of the good souls and so great their ardour to be the Chicago de Caillavet and de Flers, that a rub on the sore place and they are forever once again up and at it. Does a *double entente* perch upon the window sill of their chamber and chirp, and the Hattons are out of bed at a jump and off to the pantry after the salt-shaker. Does a *double entente* show its head over the underbrush and the Hattons dash wildly to the edge of the lake and set sailing a decoy duck to lure it within range. But nary a genuine *double entente* falls into their clutches. For what they capture, when they capture anything, is less a *double entente* than a raw smoking-car story, a mining-camp jape, a traveling salesman's wheeze. And, further, not a ribald

*plaisanterie* swaggering unashamed in its ribaldry, and so open to no charge of leer or hypocrisy, but rather something that gives one the impression of smut in a kimono, of dirt grinning at one from behind a screen and crooking its finger. The *double entente* of such Frenchmen as Guitry  *fils* and Picard, such Italians as Bracco, such transplanted Swedes as Adolf Paul, such Germans as Thoma, and such an American as Zoë Akins, is to be bred not, as the Hattons believe, merely by crossing smut with cölogne, but by the infinitely more difficult trick of crossing wit with literary skill. *Double entente* is not, as the Hattons present it, an obstetrician in a dress suit; it is a well-bred young woman in negligée.

## § 53

*J. M. Barrie.*—The triumph of sugar over diabetes.

## § 54

*Episode in the Career of a Critic of the Drama.*—Two days before the opening of the new Selwyn Theatre in West Forty-second Street, the management by uniformed special messenger sent me, in the stead of the reviewer's conventional paste-board tickets of admission, a box from Tiffany's



wherein, amid a wealth of tissue paper, lay a handsome leather case (also from Tiffany's) wherein in turn, amid more tissue paper, lay a magnificent sterling silver plate (also from Tiffany's) engraved with my name, a number of gorgeous scrolls and circumbendiba, and the legend "Admit two." Obviously, said I to myself, on gazing upon this costly boon—obviously, said I, the MM. Selwyn are about to open their new *musée* with an especial *pièce de resistance*, a true goody, a something extra-fine. This must be, I said, since for such things as Forbes-Robertson's "Hamlet" and "Cæsar and Cleopatra" the Shuberts had sent me by the mere mails the ordinary stereotyped cardboard tickets, since for Bernhardt's "L'Aiglon" the Frohman office had merely scribbled on a somewhat dirty scrap of paper the figure 2, and since for Duse's "Heimat" in Paris, I well recalled, the manager had simply shouted to one of the ushers to give me whatever decent seat he could find vacant. In view of all this, repeated I to myself as I gazed upon the MM. Selwyn's dazzling grant, in view of all this, said I, the MM. Selwyn must have something vintage, some impeccable bijou, some great ruby, to set out before me. Here, whispered I, would be no merely fine drama, but

something literally to floor and stun: a drama to remember when other dramas had long gone, a drama to thunder its echoes down the esplanade of time.

So came the night of the event. Impressed and not a little *bouleversé* by the handsome leather case and my magnificent sterling silver ticket, I dressed with unwonted and scrupulous care, essaying full half a dozen ties until one suited punctiliously the contour of my chin and a half dozen pairs of pumps until the leather of one matched precisely the shade of my trousers' braid. A bit of pomade upon my hair, a boutonnière, a flip to the topper—and the glass satisfied me I was appropriate to the great occasion. To Delmonico's then, the handsome leather case and my magnificent sterling silver ticket in my pocket, for a properly preparatory repast. A slice of Honey Dew, consommé Sultan, a timbale à la Condé, red-snapper à la Vénitienne, a côtelette de Chevreuil, a sorbet, chapous truffes, poires à la Richelieu, gâteau Baba aux fruits—and *en passant* a Taverne cocktail, a pint of Perier Jouet, a bit of Johannisberger Blue Seal 1862 and a few tablespoons of cognac to wash it down. A Partagas Extremoso Delicioso, a victoria—the handsome leather case and my magnificent sterling

silver ticket would deign to abide no mere taximeter cab—and, heigho *cocher*, I was arrived at the MM. Selwyn's propylon!

I was, I confess it, agog. The lobby flooded the night with a thousand brilliant lights. The MM. Selwyn, dressed to kill, stood beside an immense horseshoe of pink roses and, beaming spacious beams, addressed to me words of welcome. The aged keeper of the door bowed meekly as I flashed him with my handsome leather case and my magnificent sterling silver ticket. The elegant head usher, glimpsing my handsome leather case and my magnificent sterling silver ticket, saluted me *à la militaire*. The but slightly less elegant assistant head usher followed suit and hastened to signal one of the menial ushers to escort me to my chair. Grandly was I led by this menial through an Italian Renaissance *promenoir* unstintedly embellished with gilt Byzantine griffins, silver Assyrian hippogriffs, still lifes by Candido Vitali, the flags of the Allies, a Greek urn or two, several Louis XIV tapestries, a Roycroft library table, a number of baskets of artificial poppies and goldenrod, and four or five of Lewis and Conger's sociable brass spittoons—and waved into the *fauteuil* designated on my magnificent sterling silver ticket.

I was breathless with the grandeur of it all.

And profoundly moved and expectant. Hauptmann at the very least! mused I. And, even so, this Hauptmann fellow would under the circumstances be at his best none too good. Or mayhap Rostand! Yet this Rostand also would under the circumstances be something of a disappointment even at *his* best. The MM. Selwyn's plum was unquestionably a more juicy one. I looked at the handsome leather case and my magnificent sterling silver ticket (allowed in my keeping as a souvenir of the high event), and was certain.

The big orchestra boomed out "The Star Spangled Banner" and, with the audience to its feet, the national emblem was flung proudly in dedication across the proscenium. . . . Andreyev or von Hofmannsthal! One or the other, I was now sure. Nothing less! . . . The big orchestra, the audience again seated, was at the overture, the "Mireille" of Gounod. . . . At least de Curel or Björnsterne Björnson, I would have bet my shirt! Or perchance some posthumously discovered MS. of Strindberg. Or something of Schnitzler or Tchekhov. Or even—though this was under the circumstances unthinkable—a vulgar descent to Gorki or Heijermans or Gabriele D'Annunzio. . . . The orchestra became silent. . . . A lung-filled hush swept the auditorium. . . . The lights

became very, very slowly dim. . . . The luxurious plush curtain rose.

“Don’t she look just like a picture!” ecstatically exclaimed a fat actress in a maid’s costume, peering through some pink curtains at the left of the stage.

The pink curtains were then pulled apart and revealed the leading woman in a pink nightgown trimmed with dyed pussy languishing in a pink bed and making winks at the friends out front.

I seized my gorgeous program in seven colours print upon vellum. And this is what I saw:

*Jane Cowl*  
in  
“*Information, Please!*”  
by  
*Jane Cowl*

§ 55

*Haddon Chambers.*—In my perhaps sometimes unjust critical canon, a dramatist is held always to be as strong as his weakest banality. It is be-

cause of this and because in the midst of even the best of his good writing he descends now and then to the most doggrel showhouse platitude, that I hold Mr. Haddon Chambers in less than the common esteem. If a man writes a distinctly first-rate play, but somewhere—and however briefly—in that play makes a small joke on Watt Street or Swiss cheese or Yonkers, my prejudice, for all his otherwise distinctly first-rate work, dispatches the fellow without further ado. Thus, though in a play like “The Saving Grace” Mr. Chambers exhibits a considerable measure of finished writing, polished humour and occasionally dexterous characterization, the resident impression I take away from the piece is of the butler sneaking the usual two drinks of sherry on the sly and, upon the sound of footsteps, gliding away from the decanter, the meanwhile whistling in innocent nonchalance.

Were minutes hours or even half-hours, Mr. Chambers would be a precellent dramatist. In his almost every piece of writing for the stage, he discloses various minutes of sound worth. But these separate minutes, save possibly in his “Tyranny of Tears,” are ever drowned in overwhelming waves of inconsequent observation and the more or less manifest theatrical dodges. There are several such valuable minutes in his “Saving Grace.”

But they, as in his other plays, are surrounded and riddled to the death by overtures in which two typical Jerome K. Jerome servants set the table and identify the characters presently due to appear, by the bewhiskered whangdoodle of the faithful family retainer who gulps and nobly declines to desert his financially distressed employer, by the equally bearded platitude of the last moment telegram that turns the hero's fortunes, and similar dramatic crutches.

## § 56

*The Palais Royal Naturalized.*—Were Brieux's "Damaged Goods" to be adapted in terms of German measles and George Moore's little Luachet in terms of Little Red Riding Hood, the result would not be more confounding than the invariable local conceit of presenting the bed of Palais Royal farce in terms of mistletoe. The notion, commonly suffered by the native writer for the theatre, that an American audience will not stomach adultery in light farce is absurdly ill-founded, as the first adapter who sees through the current superstition will amply prove. The general practice of adapting this adultery out of a play and converting it into a pinch on the arm, or something equally lubricious, not only of course makes the theme of

the play perfectly ridiculous, but sorely damages the box-office values to boot. When a loose fish goes into a young woman's bed-chamber late at night and without opposition remains in it until early the next morning, there isn't an audience in the whole of the United States that can be persuaded to believe for a single moment that all the fellow did in there was to play post-office. And while such an audience is willing—for the sake of the tradition forced upon it against its will and common sense—good-naturedly and temporarily to overlook the preposterous equivocation around half-past nine, it plainly begins to lose patience when the equivocation is thereafter insisted upon every other minute and when, in the midst of the insistence, it suddenly develops that the young woman who voluptuously held hands with the Lothario is *enceinte*.

Ten years ago, the American audience may have held, with commendable steadfastness of faith, that adultery was confined to milk, but in the meantime its suspicions may be said to have become somewhat aroused.

### § 57

*Satire.*—The seat of the trousers pursuing a slapstick.



## § 58

*The American Sentimentality.*—A proof of the incurable sentimentality of American theatregoers is to be had in the case of Mr. Bert Williams. Williams, seven or eight years ago, showed promise as a comedian. But, each year since, he has revealed himself as an increasingly inept and unimaginative performer. Yet each year he is proclaimed a better and better comedian, and applauded the more and more, merely because he happens to be a negro.

## § 59

*The Artificial Play.*—To the composition of even the most artificial of comedies, an intrinsic sense of touch and go with life is patently essential. Without this, the result is a play artificial not in the intentional and appropriate sense, but artificial in the sense of a street-light left unwittingly to burn after dawn.

## § 60

*The End of a Perfect Dane.*—Every once in a while the gentlemen who manufacture dramatic criticism for the New York newspapers and maga-

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zines achieve a performance in the slapstick and seltzer siphon so brilliant that it must fetch a tear of envy to the entrepreneurs of burlesque, small-time vaudeville and the pie film. In considerable part the species of dramatic commentators who believe that when Al Jolson falls with a thud upon his pelvis the spectacle is vulgar, and that when Falstaff falls with a thud upon his it is Art, these gentlemen rarely allow a month to pass without applying the bilbo to their own hinter-pant and squirting themselves in the ear with the mechanical carafe. By archæologists of the bean feast, such periodic critical rendezvous with the loaded stogie are recognized as of a piece with the finest low comedy of the actual stage, and as such are properly eulogized to their niches in the ante-chamber of the temple of the beaux arts.

The late war doubled up the sheets on the local Hazlitttry with a persistent and sardonic waggery and augmented at least fiftyfold the unwitting metropolitan critical comedy. For the war patently made the German, Austrian and Hungarian dramatist as popular in the Anglo-Saxon theatre as a loud, wet sneeze and an indulgence in left-handed stratagem was hence made necessary when producers and adapters desired to present the work of these enemy craftsmen in that theatre.

The result, as observed, was a critical wayzgoose of truly magnificent proportions: a dazzling standing upon heads and tripping over mats and dancing of the bump-polka the like of which even two such proficient critical comedians as Mr. J. T. Grein, of London, and Mr. J. Ranken Towse, of the New York *Evening Post*, have with all their virtuosity in unconscious monkeyshine been in the past unable to equal in even an entire quarter column of theatrical comment.

Among the most extravagant capers cut by the local *guérinets* during this period of managerial war-time subterfuge will be recalled the now celebrated instance of the unanimous acceptance of "Such Is Life," a play produced in the Princess Theatre and credited to the British playwright, Harold Owen, as a typical example of modern English comedy. This "Such Is Life," as will coincidentally be recalled, was actually a word-for-word translation of "The Book of a Woman," a well-known and typical modern German comedy by the well-known Berlin playwright, Lothar Schmidt. A tutti of not less imposing sweetness, as connoisseurs of the more refined cheese wheezes will remember, was brought on with the presentation of a play called "Grasshopper," in the Garrick Theatre. This play was the work of von Keyser-

ling, the German, whose dramatic writings are comparatively as familiar to Munich audiences as are those of George Broadhurst to New York. The play was duly credited to von Keyserling but, by way of safeguarding the box-office against the omnipresent and alert Mrs. Jays, the management prudently dropped the *von* and gave out that Mr. E. Keyserling, as they dubbed him, was a Russian dramatist. This news the critical gentlemen of the metropolitan brochures promptly swallowed, with the result that the reviews of the play were rich in profound comparisons of "The Moscow Keyserling's" writing with that of such of his fellow Russian dramatists as Ostrovsky, Griboyedov, Gogol and Turgenev and such of his fellow Russian poets as Tyntchev and Pushkin. In this enterprise, the Beaumarchais of *The Times* (the young Professor Dr. Woolcott) was especially informative and, if I remember rightly, devoted considerable extra space in his Sunday edition to an illuminating *feuilleton* in which he commented extensively and instructively upon Keyserling's proud place in modern Russian dramatic literature.

Another if possibly not so mouth-watering delicacy was the concerted critical promulgation of "The Blue Pearl" as a typical specimen of the American crook melodrama, the play—credited on

the playbill to Miss Anne Crawford Flexner—being actually a translation of Arnim Friedmann's and Paul Frank's Viennese sex triangle comedy, "The Blue Crocodile." And still another—although the war had no share in this drollery—was the extravagant praise of the actor, H. B. Warner, for his "fine art in holding the stage during a fifteen minute soliloquy" in "Sleeping Partners" (I quote the *Globe* Aristobulus by way of sample), when the truth was that the actor's art was so extraordinarily fine that Guitry's original soliloquy, with all its sly fancy and humour, had to be cut exactly in half to meet the Warner deficiency in talent for holding the stage. The original soliloquy, incidentally, was read in full in the London presentation of the play by a performer even so lacking in fine art as Mr. Seymour Hicks.

But with all this—and all this is as nothing beside the bible of critical foot-slippings and ker-flops that in the early war years entertained the archdeacons of joy—the real *pièce*, the cake for the birthday, the *plat* filled with the maraschino, was yet to come, since the last war year was to bring with it the most truly beautiful flower of journalistic criticism, the most truly lovely bloom, that has thus far blossomed out of the show pews of

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Broadway. For in this year there was presented in the Harris Theatre a play, and the play was called "The Riddle: Woman," and here follows the jocund tale.

This play was written about ten years ago by Rudolf Jakobi, the well-known Hungarian dramatist, and was produced under the same title in the seasons directly following both in the Volkstheater of Vienna and the Deutsches Theater of Berlin. The Messrs. Shubert, subsequently planning to exploit in this country a Danish actress named Betty Nansen, purchased the American rights to the Hungarian play and employed their play-reader, Miss Charlotte Wells, to make a translation of the play in collaboration with Miss Dorothy Donnelly. These ladies took the Hungarian manuscript in hand and, by way of injecting an atmosphere into it that might the better suit the Danish actress, changed the locale from Austria-Hungary to Copenhagen and such character names as Julius Schebitz, Hermann Dunkel and Lena Wegenstein to Lars Olrik, Erik Helsing and Thora Bertol. Meanwhile, however, the Messrs. Shubert decided not to exploit the Danish actress and relinquished their rights to both the original Hungarian play and the translation. For several years the play rested in the translators' desk drawer; and

then one day along came Bertha Kalich, the pushcart Bernhardts, with her black eye peeled for a Broadway vehicle. And out from its nest came the dusty adaptation of Rudolf Jakobi's opus.

The Kalich blood-pressure jumped sixty points when she read the adaptation, and she decided to present it instant. But care must be exercised! the adapters warned her. For the war, as has been said, made it a risky box-office-busting business to put on a play from the pen of an enemy dramatist. The Wagner-chuckers and Kreisler-grabbers and Muck-rakers were ever snooping around in gum boots! Well, why not throw them off the scent; why not drop the suspiciously beery Rudolf and substitute for it simply the initial C—C might be taken to stand for something Copenhagenish like Copnus; why not spell Jakobi as Jacobi; and why not, finally, announce this C. Jacobi on the playbills as a Danish playwright and "The Riddle: Woman" as a Danish drama? A rich idea; and no sooner conceived than executed. And thus it came about that Bertha Kalich opened one fine night at the Harris Theatre in the celebrated Danish play, "The Riddle: Woman," by the eminent Dane, Mr. C. Jacobi.

Now for the criticisms of this famous Scandinavian work.

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Thus, the learned Sir Isumbras to the *World*:  
“The play’s foreign manner is easy to detect. The program’s acknowledgment was hardly necessary that Charlotte Wells and Dorothy Donnelly, who made the present version, went as far afield as Denmark to find the original in a drama by C. Jacobi. This Danish play is as danksome as the emanations of the Scandinavian dramatists usually are.”

Ah, Isumbras, the danksome Budapest of ten years ago!

Thus, the Pupienus Maximus to the *Globe*:  
“It is evident from the first of this Danish drama that C. Jacobi knows well his Scandinavian temperament.”

So, the Eumolpus to the *Sun*: “The play is an offshoot of the Scandinavian school of drama . . . of the sort that Ibsen might have thrown off. The Scandinavian characteristics are more than superficial. The story is one of seething passions, of the volcanic emotions of descendants of the Vikings. . . .”

Thus, the Theodorus Gaza to the *Evening World*, who—as will be noted—evidently read the play in the original Danish: “Charlotte Wells and Dorothy Donnelly have taken the Danish play of C. Jacobi and made it an interesting sex drama. It was all of that—and a bit more perhaps—in its



original form. There is no particular reason for considering the work that Miss Wells and Miss Donnelly have done. The main fact is that the play suggests . . . the thought of Ibsen. The first act brings back Hedda Gabler and Mrs. Elvsted . . .", etc.

So, the Giuseppe Fiorelli to the *Herald*, who was apparently also privy to the original: "The adapters acknowledge indebtedness for their idea to the Danish play by C. Jacobi. It might be wiser to acknowledge even more than the idea, since the Danish names of the characters are retained . . .", etc.

And thus, with firm finality, the profound M. Towse, Titus Livius to the *Evening Post*: "The simple fact is that in this case, as in a very large proportion of the modern Scandinavian drama, the main material . . .", etc.

Again, to turn to the periodicals, so the omniscient M. Metcalfe, Ippolito Rosellini to *Life*: "The Mesdames Wells and Donnelly seem to have translated 'The Riddle: Woman' almost literally from a Danish play by C. Jacobi."

And so, again, the ordinarily sagacious M. Lewisohn, Alonso de Ojeda to *Town Topics*: "As Danish libertines are more picturesque than those of other countries—with which we have been sur-

feited—the adapters have not transplanted the locale of the original play.”

And so, still again, the pregnant M. Clayton Hamilton, Rasmus Rask and Acusilaus to *Vogue*: “The piece was adapted from the Danish of C. Jacobi . . . and we should be duly thankful to his two American adapters for drawing attention to his prowess . . .”, etc.

I need not go in for more. Without exception, whether in the instance of newspaper or weekly or monthly magazine, was the lay public fully enlightened by its critical savants on the “modern school of Scandinavian drama of which ‘The Riddle: Woman’ is a typical example and of which C. Jacobi is a typical exponent.” . . .

The incurable fancy, promiscuously held and fostered by the local professors of criticism, that the Danish drama is insistently and invariably a sour drama, a drama of passion, abnormality and low lights, should dally in passing with a number of such familiar Danish plays as Gustav Wied’s “ $2 \times 2 = 5$ ,” or “Thummelumsen,” or Gustav Esman’s “Father and Son.” For, contrary to being a typical specimen of the modern Scandinavian problem drama, “The Riddle: Woman” is a typical example of the modern Austro-Hungarian problem

drama. For one Austro-Hungarian like Schnitzler, or Sil Vara or Molnar who writes with charming sophistication in the twilight mood, there are two dozen who annually grind out naïve morning-after yokel-yankers in the glowering mid-Pinero mood. No twelvemonth passes in the Austro-Hungarian theatre without its ample procession of "Riddle Women," without its long series of reboiled Tanquerays and Irises. In the half season directly preceding the war, precisely twenty-eight such ancient and artless boudoir explosions were set before the public in question. And for the full season of 1913-14, the easily accessible Künast and Knepler statistics reveal a doubled dose. . . . It therefore grieves me sorely to report that Mr. "C. Jacobi" is approximately as Danish as Chauncey Olcott.

### § 61

*Amour in the Theatre.*—The basic difference between a comic opera libretto and a drama is generally this: In a libretto the interest of everybody on the stage and of nobody in the audience is centered on the successful culmination of the hero's love affair. In drama the situation is the reverse.

§ 62

*The Broadway "Literary" Playwright.*—The technique of the Broadway "literary" playwright consists (1) in expressing the simplest thought in the most complex manner possible and (2) supplanting any monosyllabic word that may crop up in the expression with a word at least four inches long. Thus, if in one of his plays he desires a character to observe that it is time for tea, the Broadway "literary" playwright goes about the enterprise something like this. He writes, first, the simple line, "It is time for tea." Scrutinizing the line closely, and detecting its baldness, he then changes the line to read, "The hour for the service of tea has arrived." This line he ponders, deems a trifle too bourgeois, and presently converts into "The appropriate period for the distribution of tea has overtaken us." Nor is the line yet precisely to his Corinthian palate. And slowly it becomes "The meet moment of God's beautiful day for the social custom of distributing tea has dawned upon the conscience." So much for the first step in the technique. It now but remains to take out the little words and supplant them with as many true beauties. And so, at length, the line that

the character speaks is not the merely plebeian "It is time for tea" but the vastly more *delicat* and impressive "The consentaneous conjuncture in the Infinite and Eternal's tessellated nonce for the homiletical punctilio of dispensing the brew of the *Camellia theifera* has dawned upon the acroamatism." The impression one consequently takes away from such a play is of having been present at a discourse by the debating team of the Tuskegee Institute on the one side and Montague Glass' Henry D. Feldman, Mr. Thorstein Veblen and a Baume Analgesique circular on the other.

## § 63

*Eugene Walter.*—The technic of Mr. Eugene Walter in the achievement of stage melodrama would appear to be as follows: first, to take a story intrinsically devoid of melodrama; second, to write that story on the smallest possible number of Western Union Telegraph blanks; third, to throw away half the blanks; and, fourth, by way of making the remaining blanks then pass for tense melodrama, to cause what is written on them to be recited by a company of actors in a rapid, nervous and confused whisper. Mr. Walter's method may be concretely impressed upon the reader by

asking him to think of some such jingle as, for instance,

Mary had a little lamb  
Its fleece was white as snow,  
And everywhere that Mary went  
The lamb was sure to go.

Here, the reader will grant, may be inherent many things, but assuredly no great amount of melodrama. Now, however, for Mr. Walter's secret. First, imagine a darkened stage. Then,

Detective X

*(Quickly flashing a pocket-light around the dark room, taking three rapid strides toward the door at left centre, and speaking in a rapid, quivering undertone):*

Mary had a little lamb.

Detective Y

*(Stepping quietly to Detective's X's side, placing a restraining hand upon his wrist, and speaking in a breathless whisper):*

Its fleece was white as snow.

Detective X

*(Glancing quickly to the right and extinguishing the pocket-flash. In a voice shaking with suppressed excitement and scarcely audible):*

And everywhere that Mary went.

Detective Y

*(Handing Detective X his revolver. In a tense vibrating pianissimo):*

The lamb was sure to go!

—and you have the Walter system. A pocket-flash, a revolver, a dark stage, and the most innocent lines spoken as if the actors had lost their voices and were victims of palpitation of the heart —and you have the necessary air of mystery, foreboding and suspense.

#### § 64

*The Well-Mannered Play.*—All that seems necessary to persuade the average play-reviewer that a play and production are well-mannered is for the producer to direct that the play be enacted in a very slow and deliberate tempo, that the actors speak softly, and that the chairs on the stage be upholstered in some colour other than red or green.

#### § 65

*On Beauty.*—My favourite and oft-repeated contention that one good-looking girl is sufficient to make almost any kind of music show thoroughly enjoyable, is once again eloquently proved in the case of such an Anglo-Saxon production as “Over the Top,” and at the same time even more eloquently disproved in the case of such a Latin production as “A Night in Spain.” In the first direct

instance, what is otherwise an entertainment of modest pressure is given a tripled fillip through the presence on the stage of the arch tit-bit known as Justine Johnstone, and in the second indirect instance, what is otherwise an entertainment of superior pressure is deleted of not the slightest fillip by the presence on the stage of a company of ladies even the most beautiful of whom fails signally in ambrosial approach to a cow.

The Spanish type of beauty, of which these latter ladies are somewhat remotely representative, is, for all the democratic affectation of the Anglo-Saxon Lothario, as much below the American type of beauty as the American is below the Japanese. Beauty, after all, in its general world sense, is determinable very largely in accordance with its degree of delicacy, as Nietzsche and numerous others have pointed out. The Spanish beauty is the beauty of the ripe tomato; the American, the beauty of a slice of tomato on a lettuce leaf; the Japanese, the *utsukushiki* of the lettuce leaf. To the true connoisseur, whether Spanish or American, the Spanish bloom has about it something too much of the quality of the tube-rose, of a parade with the brass bands too close together, of a Hofbräu *carte du jour*: it is, in a word, too excessive, too luxuriant. And when, as in the case of the "Night



in Spain" ladies, the exhibited beauty is as far removed from the flower of Spanish beauty as is the beauty exhibited in the Avenue des Acacias from the flower of French beauty, the nature of the æsthetic sensation imparted may be imagined. But, as I have in the beginning suggested, it is this very lack of beauty in these señoritas that presents us with our embarrassing paradox. Where the merely half-way homeliness so common to the New York stage chills—or, at best, leaves one indifferent—the very amazing homeliness of these ladies, by virtue of its sheer magnitude and unaffected splendour, enchants completely. Where the average moderately personable Broadway music show creatures fail to divert the eye a second time after the first chorus, these gorgeously unlovely things attract and hold immobile that same eye as absolutely as—and in the same way as—Cyrano de Bergerac and the Elsie de Wolf scenery, Courbet's "Les Baigneuses" and green stockings, the Fifth Avenue residence of Senator Clark and Jojo the Dog-Faced Boy, a Boston bull and the nudes of Paul Cézanne, or Madame Polaire and Youngstown, Ohio. Miss Johnstone is to the Señorita Marco, true enough, as Aquavit is to beer; but, as any more civilized Scandinavian will assure you, there are paradoxes in tipples no less than in æs-

thetics, and the two, though you believe it or not, may yet be mixed to the charm of the palate and the complete satisfaction of the judge of fine arts.

### § 66

*Toujours Perdrix.*—One of the legitimate objections to the dramatic critic is that he always thinks in terms of the theatre. When an undertaker falls in love with a woman, he does not visualize his beloved as a corpse. When a chemist falls in love, he doesn't appraise his fair one in terms of so much hydrogen, chlorine and Johann Hoff's Malt Extract—or whatever is the combination that goes to make up human life. But the dramatic critic is always odiously saturated with the things of his trade. The critic being, obviously, at least one hundred times more a theatregoer than the man to whom theatregoing is not a trade but a diversion, is at least one hundred times more thoroughly imbued with the things of the theatre. Visiting a great man-o'-war on a gala day, he is impressed not so much with the thing itself as with the notion that it looks like the second act of "Pinafore." . . . Wall Street is not Wall Street to him: it is merely the big scene in "The Pit." . . . The voluminous and exotic bill-of-fare in a German restaurant

looks to him exactly like the cast of "Ben Hur." . . . How then does the dramatic critic justify his existence? He believes that there is room for experienced opinion on the drama and that the best man to voice such opinion is himself—the man who gets free seats—since it is impossible to expect any opinion worth hearing from anyone so imbecile as to pay two dollars and a half to get into the average American theatre.

### § 67

*The Chewing Gum Drama.*—In the program of each New York theatre there has been appearing for years a conspicuous advertisement of the Adams Chewing Gum Company which in heroic type so informs the audience: "*All those who have to make good and understand that no excuse goes, chew gum. It is the one ideal habit of the alert!*"

Since the Adams Chewing Gum Company is unquestionably an astute concern and one that shrewdly sees to it that its advertising is placed where it will most impress and convince, there follows the syllogism (1) that the Adams Chewing Gum Company must have a pretty good idea as to the precise quality of the New York theatre audience, (2) that whereas one has heard not so much

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as a suspicion of facetious comment on the advertisement from a member of a New York theatre audience, the meat of the advertisement must be concurred in by that audience or, at least, not found bizarre, and (3) that, therefore, the New York theatre audience which the dramatist and producer must please is made up of a group of persons who believe that Dr. Beeman is a greater man than Beethoven.

With a few distinguished exceptions, the drama divulged in New York year by year hence continues to be of the chewing gum brand. For one presentation like the sprightly "Le Roi" of de Cailavet, de Flers and Arène, there is ever the usual plenitude of dramatic *opera* of the kidney of "Broken Threads," in which the hero, cross-examined by the heroine, admits that there is another woman whom he has loved and will never forget, only to confess finally, after an appropriate amount of quivery dialogue on the E string, that he has been referring to his mother. And for one representation of Pinero's genuine comedy romance "Quex," ever a full measure of bogus romances after the fashion of "The Pipes of Pan," in which the Stars, the Moon, the Boul' Mich', the Call of Spring and the rest of the hackneyed blubber troupe are trotted out on their alpenstocks and

wheel-chairs to make calves' eyes at the Philistine tear duct.

§ 68

*J. Hartley Manners.*—The philosophy of J. Hartley Manners, as typically revealed in such of his plays as, for example, "The Harp of Life," has all the efficiency of a bloodhound with a cold. Seizing in this instance upon the theme maneuvered by Wedekind in "The Awakening of Spring," by Cosmo Hamilton in "The Blindness of Virtue," by Ludwig Thoma, satirically, in "Lottie's Birthday," and by writers on end fore and aft, Mr. Manners contrives by a masterly application of cerebral infelicities to make of that theme a thing of serio-comic fluff. Mr. Manners believes that a young boy's curiosity in matters of sex may best be stifled by telling him plainly about such matters, a theory somewhat akin to a belief that the best way in which to keep a young boy from desiring to taste champagne is to open a bottle in his presence. Mr. Manners is respectfully referred to Havelock Ellis. Mr. Manners should know that temptation and warning are twin sisters. To this, the admonitory "wet paint" placard and the provoking impulse to touch a finger to the paint to see if it actually is wet offer some testimony.

So, too, by way of testimony we have keep-off-the-grass signs, prohibition and married women. Mr. Manners also believes that a boy's mother, for the prosperity of his future manhood, should be his sole playmate (the Oberon complex), and that the way in which best to make him respect and be faithful to one woman is to be told suddenly that another woman whom he has respected and fallen in love with has been faithful to some half dozen men. Mr. Manners is, in fine, the sort of dramatist who pours the sugar on the coffee instead of the coffee on the sugar.

## § 69

*The Comic Motion Picture.*—The popular Mr. Charles Chaplin's latest motion pictures provide a still further testimonial to the versatility of the fellow as a low comedian. A touch of Chaplin now and again is a serviceable diversion against the laboured unfunniness of the posturing artists of Broadway. He is, however, to be taken in small doses, like a few leaves of an artichoke or a sip of Vieille Cure. Too much of him dulls the palate, impairs the taste. And yet, for all the splendour of the fellow's estate in this fair republic, it is but true that not only is he not nearly so good a comedian as his brother, Mr. Sidney

Chaplin (whose "The Plumber" is by all odds the most adroitly conceived and cleverly executed motion picture thus far revealed to the public—I offer here less my personal and very largely unsubstantial opinion of such things than a consensus of more authentic judgments) but more, not nearly so genuinely happy a pantaloon as several unidentified and tough-bottomed fellows who cavort through the so-called Keystone screen comedies directed by a Mr. Mack Sennett. This Sennett is probably the most fecund inventor and merchant of the slapstick masque the civilized world has yet seen. A spectator of but very few of his pictures, I am yet fascinated by the resourceful imagination of the fellow. An erstwhile chorus man in the Casino music shows, Sennett has done the work he set out to do with a skill so complete, with a fertility so copious, that he has graduated himself as the foremost bachelor of custard-pie arts, the foremost conductor of the bladder. He is, in short, the very best entrepreneur of low comedy the amusement world has known. He has made probably twice as many millions laugh as have all of Shakespeare's clowns and all the music show comedians on earth rolled together. And laughter knows no caste, no altitude of brow. I do not know whether this Sennett imagines all his

scenarios. But whether he imagines them all or only a few, whether a portion of the credit goes to his writing staff or not, Sennett himself is without doubt the inspirational spring. There is more loud laughter in his picture showing the fire-hose-flooded house with the bathtub containing a flapper working loose from its moorings and starting on a mad career down the stairs, out the door and down the turbulent gutters to the Pacific Ocean, and with the populace in avid pursuit, than there is in a hundred farces by Brandon Thomases. And there is as large an intestinal glee in his picture showing the wind-storm blowing the nocturnal pedestrian into a strange house and into a strange bed already occupied by the person of a sweet one as there was in a single serious drama by the late Steele Mackaye. These Sennett things, too, must of course be used sparingly. One can no more endure them often—every week, say—than one could endure every week a new book of Ade's fables in slang or a new farce by Bernard Shaw. It is the nature of such things—excellent as they individually are—that their zest departs when approached too frequently. But a farce by Shaw or a fable by Ade or a trouser sonata by Sennett is each in itself a distinctive, albeit remotely related, work of art.



## § 70

*Art Via the Side-Street*.—That the stage introduction to America of the rare and imaginative work of Dunsany would eventually have to be vouchsafed by amateurs was, of course, to be expected. Just as it is a tradition on the part of our professional managers that, in a military play, no matter where a soldier is wounded he must always wear a bandage around his forehead, so is it a tradition of our theatre that either amateurs or Arnold Daly must finally be entrusted with introducing to the American public all the really worthwhile dramatists. Thus, Shaw had to be given his first American hearing up a side-street. So, too, Echegaray (at Mrs. Osborn's Playhouse). So, too, Strindberg. So, too, Björnson. So, too, St. John Ervine, and Bergström, and Tchekhov, and Andreyev, and all the rest.

## § 71

*The Censor*.—How like a hair the line that separates respect and ridicule! What if, at the height of his moral crusading power, a waggish theatrical manager could have got hold of a photograph of Anthony Comstock taken at the age of two show-

ing him—as was the genial mode in those days—stark naked!

## § 72

*On Critical Prejudice.*—The dramatic critic who is without prejudice is on the plane with the general who does not believe in taking human life. He is unfit for his job, out of place, a strayed buffoon. To be without prejudice is to be without learning, without viewpoint, without philosophy, without courage; in short, a mental neutral. The ideal critic is he who venerates like a Turk, who hates like a Corsican—and who knows no compromise on middle ground. His estimate of art is his estimate of Madeira: it is either good or bad. There is neither such thing as fair art nor fair Madeira. His business is not to encourage signs of talent. His business is simply with talent or lack of talent. He is not a school teacher: he is the school teacher's husband. He is not a youth, open to this change and to that, but a man whose mind has walked the Louvres of the world and is just a bit tired. He is not a judge: he is that which, being the lingering bloom of judgments long since withered, is harsher, more relentless than judge: he is reverie and reminiscence.

## § 73

*The Commercial Theatre.*—As only a millionaire, whatever the depth or quality of his artistic appreciations, can buy the finest art treasures, so can only a rich theatre buy the treasures of new dramatic art and present them as they should be presented. There is much nonsense written contrariwise by amiable souls who agreeably believe that the best dramatists are glad to give away their plays for nothing if only to serve the cause of art and who believe, further, that these plays may be presented with rare beauty in side-street little theatres by amateurs who are occultly able to make thirty-eight dollars' worth of cheese-cloth look like three thousand dollars' worth of Gordon Craig. The notion gained from reading breathless articles by visiting school-teachers to the effect that the greatest art theatre in Russia—if not in the world—was operated with the few dollars taken in from the small audiences is a notion more pretty than true. The greatest art theatre in Russia—if not in the world—enjoyed from its very inception the fat and liberal sustaining purse of a wealthy champion, without which it could never have existed. Reinhardt and his fine enterprises in Berlin were financed by wealthy social pushers.

The Odéon of Antoine, and the National of Stockholm, and the Español of Madrid, were subventioned theatres. And even our own Washington Square Players, though it is not generally known, were compelled to rely—for all their noble effort to make cheese-cloth look like satin—on the bank-book of a Wall Street banker. And though these young impresarios did much excellent work, the fact persists that when this banker withdrew his life-giving purse in order to devote that purse to the institution in America of Copeau's Theatre du Vieux Colombier, the art theatre of the Washington Square Players had to throw in the towel and close its doors.

The most grasping dramatists are generally not (as is commonly supposed) the hack playwrights of Broadway, the Strand and the Boulevards, but the best—or at least the most famous—dramatists. Rostand, with the help of shrewd counselors, practised upon Charles Frohman's French agent an auction sale of the American rights to "Chantecler" so adroitly manipulated that Frohman was compelled to pay an exorbitant price for those rights. Shaw's contract, which he has written himself and caused to be printed at his own expense, is three feet long and, in addition to demanding a flat fifteen per cent of the gross re-

ceipts (the customary percentage is five, seven and one-half, and ten per cent on the first five thousand, seven thousand five hundred, and ten thousand dollars respectively) clairvoyantly demands a share of all tickets sold to hotel agencies and speculators at an advance over the box-office price. To obtain the plays of such dramatists as these takes not mere "art talk," as the Rialto phrase has it, but cold hard cash—and a great deal of it. And to obtain even the good theatre plays of such considerably lesser playwrights as Sacha Guitry, it is necessary to put up a substantial bonus of from five to ten thousand dollars. The American rights to Knoblauch's "Kismet" had to be bought from Oscar Asche, its English producer, with an advance payment of many thousands of dollars; and for the American rights to the spectacle "Chu Chin Chow" the local impresario was compelled to lay out to the same British producer an advance of so much as fifty thousand dollars.

A theatre may have Shakespeare and Molière for the asking, but it cannot have the best in modern drama unless its purse is well lined. A poor theatre, further, though it may have Shakespeare and Molière for the mere taking, cannot present Shakespeare and Molière beautifully, satisfactorily, however much one may pretend,

for the brave poor theatre's sake, that it can.

§ 74

*Edward Sheldon.*—Were Edward Sheldon commissioned to touch up, for example, Ibsen's "Ghosts" for the contemporary stage, it is an eminently safe wager that he would go about the enterprise something like this:

OSWALD

*(Sits in the arm-chair without moving. Suddenly, as in the distance a street-organ is heard playing "O Parigi" from "Traviata.")*

Mother, give me the sun.

MRS. ALVING

*(By the table, starts and looks at him.)*

What do you say?

OSWALD

*(Repeats, in a dull, toneless voice as the street-organ dies away and there is heard, from a neighbouring house, the voice of a young girl humming Johann Strauss' "Blue Danube" waltz.)*

The sun. The sun.

MRS. ALVING

*(Goes to him.)*

Oswald, what is the matter with you?

OSWALD

*(His muscles relax; his face becomes expressionless; his eyes take on a glassy stare. . . . In the next room*

a phonograph begins to play "*Sempre Amar*" from "*Faust*." )

The sun—

MRS. ALVING

*(Quivering with terror.)*

What is this? *(Shrieks)* Oswald! What is the matter with you? *(Falls on her knees beside him and shakes him)* Oswald! Oswald! Look at me! Don't you know me?

OSWALD

*(Tonelessly as before. The phonograph stops. There is a pause. In the distance is heard faintly a church choir singing Rheinberger's Requiem for Soldiers of the Franco-Prussian War.)*

The sun—the sun!

MRS. ALVING

*(Springs up in despair, entwines her hands in her hair and shrieks.)*

I cannot bear it! *(Whispers, as though petrified.)* I cannot bear it! Never! *(Suddenly)* Where has he got them? *(Fumbles hastily in his breast)* Here! *(Shrinks back a few steps and screams.)* No, no, no! Yes! No, no!

*(She stands a few steps away from him with her hands twisted in her hair and stares at him in speechless horror. As she stands so, there is heard approaching in the street below a party of merry-makers with a band playing Parry's "The Prodigal Son.")*

OSWALD

*(Motionless as before)*

The sun—the sun!

*(The band gradually dies out in the distance. There is a long pause. From some place far away come the strains of Tschaikowski's "Pathétique" as the curtain slowly falls.)*

Mr. Sheldon's inordinate affection for piccolos, fife and drum corps, hautboys, love-birds, harps, choirs, music-boxes, military bands, street and church organs and Victrolas in the wings is instanced anew in his every play. "Music off" is to the Sheldon faith what clothes off is to the Ziegfeld. As a result his plays and his revisions of plays generally give one the impression that the theatre in which they happen to be presented is situated always next door to Aeolian Hall.

### § 75

*Mixed Identity.*—When plays having mixed identity as their theme fail, they fail not because the audience is unwilling to grant that a man might conceivably be unable to distinguish his wife from her delectable twin sister, but because it is unwilling to grant that the man would conceivably try.

### § 76

*Unfrocking the Pretender.*—In view of the increasing prevalence of the lazy and detrimental



custom of so many of our lady players to permit expensive and magnificent *toilettes* to substitute for talent and hard work, I have a suggestion to offer our more sincere and serious producers, a suggestion which—will they carry it out—cannot, I believe, fail in time to improve to a very considerable degree the quality of acting in the native theatre.

My suggestion: Make the ladies rehearse their rôles in the altogether.

### § 77

*The Professor.*—One of the cardinal rules preached and insisted upon by the doctors of play-writing is that no play can possibly succeed and prosper if its ending is not precisely that ending—whether “happy” or “unhappy”—for which the audience has been made to hope. “Peter Pan,” with its audience invariably disappointed in the hope that Peter may remain forever with the youngsters the audience has been drawn to love, was the late Charles Frohman’s most lucrative property, has made a fortune for Maude Adams and Barrie, has brought a thousand dollars a week for the St. Louis, Missouri, stock rights, and has thus far been vainly sought from Barrie by

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eager moving picture impresarios on a bid of  
\$200,000.

§ 78

*Laughter and the Onion.*—Why should the mention of an onion infallibly provoke laughter in a popular theatre audience? Because the onion has a grave bouquet? Hardly, since the jimson-weed (*Diplotaxis muralis*), which has a far graver, provokes not the slightest laughter. Because the onion makes tears come to the eye? Impossible, since smelling salts, which distil tears twofold, brew not even a faint snicker. Because the onion, when eaten, imparts to the breath a flooring sachet? No, since *Torreya nucifera* food-oil, which imparts even more mortal zephyrs, extracts nary a weak chuckle. Because onion is a word of comic sound? Scarcely, since union, which makes no one laugh, is a word of equally comic sound. Well then, simply because an onion is an onion? Again impossible, since a scallion, which is equally an onion, doesn't elicit so much as a giggle.

§ 79

*The Broadway Curtain Speech.*—While it is quite true that the art of a playwright is not al-

ways soundly to be measured by the sort of curtain speech the playwright makes on the opening night of his play, I yet know of no surer brief and estimate of the art of such a Broadway Sardou as Mr. Willard Mack than that automatically provided by the august gentleman himself in his conduct and oral manifestations on such high occasions. I have heard Mr. Mack address the flock on at least a half dozen proud evenings and on each such memorable moment Mr. Mack has summed up Mr. Mack and the Mack art very much more pungently and illuminatingly than the most acute of his critics.

The most recent indulgence in self-appraisal on the part of this Mr. Mack occurred not long ago after the curtain in the Forty-eighth Street Theatre had come down on the third act of his newest art-piece, a serio-comic war composition hight "The Big Chance." The applause liberal, the master of the asbestos was constrained to yank the curtain up and down some nine times. On the first yank, Mr. Mack—resplendent in the outfit of a brigadier-general, for the Mack virtuosity extends to histrionism as well as to literature—was beheld bowing with elaborate and cavalierly deference at Miss Nash, the leading lady. On the second yank, the modest Mack bent himself so far in at the

diaphragm in his humble obeisance to Miss Nash that he almost lost his balance. On the third yank, Mr. Mack, growing elated over the enthusiasm of the stalls, gave Miss Nash a loud congratulatory slap upon her décolleté back. On the fourth yank, Mr. Mack, his elation growing visibly, imparted to the Nash back with his palm still another whack that made a hollow reverberating sound as if the lady were just getting out of a bathtub. On the next hoist, Mr. Mack, now nigh unable to contain himself over the tribute of the art lovers out front, grabbed Miss Nash and imprinted a loud smack upon her hand. Thrice more was the curtain then lifted and thrice more did the overjoyed Mack pay sonorous osculatory homage to the Nash fingers, wrist and forearm. And now, the curtain up again, the applause waxing hotter and his innate modesty overcome by the demonstration, Mr. Mack, with the reluctance of a pop-gun, stepped to the footlights.

"Speech! Speech!" cried someone in the back aisle, presumably under the impression that Mr. Mack had stepped to the footlights to get a haircut.

At the cry, it was plainly obvious that Mr. Mack was taken completely aback. Surprise was written clearly upon his every feature. Surprise and an

overwhelming sense of flattery. Mr. Mack demurely dropped his eyes. That one should be paid so great an encomium! But again the cry resounded from the back aisle. Plainly enough, whether he willed it or no, it was now necessary for Mr. Mack, however consuming his disrelish, to say a few words. A hush. . . . A pause. . . . Out in the lobby, a pin dropped. . . . And presently Mr. Mack spoke. As hitherto and always, not in laudation of himself, but of another. This time, of Mr. A. H. Woods who produced his opus, the liberal and unshakably confident Mr. A. H. Woods whose dogged financial plunging in the matter of this particular production—by many condemned to failure—Mr. Mack so greatly admired. To this habit of dogged plunging, Mr. Mack wished to pay tribute. He cleared his throat for the purpose. Then—

“I want to call your attention, ladies and gentlemen, to Al Woods,” spake he eloquently and feelingly—“Al Woods whose *dogmatic plundering* has made this play possible!”

And this is why I have observed that while it is quite true that the art of a playwright is not always soundly to be measured by the sort of curtain speech the playwright makes on the opening night of his play, I yet know of no surer brief and esti-

mate of the art of such a Broadway Sardou as Mr. Willard Mack than that automatically provided by Mr. Mack himself in his conduct and oral manifestations on such high occasions.

## § 80

*The Realistic Drama.*—If, as many of the so-called constructive critics maintain, it is true that our realistic American drama is eminently successful in holding the mirror up to nature, it must follow as a logical corollary that nine-tenths of the important events in our national life occur in the libraries of private houses, and that, whatever their nature, they are never without their love interest, comic relief, and display of the latest styles in women's frocks.

## § 81

*Account of a Sample Masterpiece Born of the Great War.*—It is called "Lilac Time." It was written by the Mesdames Murfin and Cowl. It is a thing of pretty actors in soldiers' suits, periodic off-stage bass drum beats bursting in the air, promiscuous fervent handshaking of the bowed-head, I-understand-old-man species, leading man

with cheeks tanned by the make-up weather who swallows when he makes love and who at great length in each act is eulogized as a hero for having performed some feat of bravery in the wings during the preceding act, leading lady in peasant girl's dresses by Lady Duff-Gordon who digs into the old trunk and sentimentally draws forth her mother's wedding veil, the playing of national airs as four stagehands make appropriate sounds beneath the window as of a regiment marching off to battle, the usual I-knew-your-father-young-man sympathetic old Major, and veteran of the Franco-Prussian war now old and gray who gives an imitation of Henry Irving playing "Waterloo" and who, after suffering a sudden and complete physical collapse following an hysterical reminiscence of valorous bygone days, sinks into a chair and promptly crosses his legs. . . .

The scene of it is laid in Berlitz, France, and the time is the war year 1918. Judging from the numerous outbursts of song on the part of the soldiers, now in solo, now in barbershop quartet grouped around a drinking table, it would seem that the authors' conception of war is that it is something like going to college. Described upon the program as "a play of youth and springtime," like so many other "plays of youth and spring-

time," it presents us in the theatre with the spectacle of a mere lad of forty-seven and his love for a slip of a girl of thirty-six or so, their moist-eyed animadversions on "the lilac time of youth" in the old garden at purple gelatine-slide time, the summoning of the lad to his country's service, the necessary postponement of the wedding that was to have been performed that very morning by the village Curé and the lowering of the curtain for a moment to indicate the impromptu passing of the young lady's virginity, the wistful looking out of the window for the lover's return with one hand clasping the baby clothes upon which the young lady has been sewing, the message that tells of the lover's home-coming, the bromo-seltzer ingénue jumpings up and down, the second message that tells of the lover's fall in battle, the young lady's tearful eyes and nose. . . .

## § 82

*The Belasco Technic.*—It is the general producing technic of David Belasco first to pick out as poor a play as he can find and then assiduously to devote his talents to distracting the audience's attention from its mediocrity.



## § 83

*The Commercial Public.*—How many, after all, the pleasant and meritorious moments in our so-called commercial theatre, moments that have been permitted by a dense or careless public and an equally dense or careless professional criticism to pass comparatively unnoticed; or else have been deliberately snickered out of court. Consider the lonely, orphaned scene in Augustus Thomas' "The Ranger," the scene between the two characters in the beleaguered stockade and the recollection by one of them of a similar situation in "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Recall the final curtain of Tom Barry's "Upstart," with the descending asbestos abruptly cutting off the flow of the young uplifter's passionate rhetoric. What, too, of the Chopin motif through Molnar's "Where Ignorance is Bliss" and the caretaker's tag, "They've all gone to the moving pictures," in Lennox Robinson's "Patriots." Consider the bit in Gillette's "Clarice" when the doomed man tears up the little sketches over which the girl has so bravely and painstakingly laboured. And the resigned smile of the husband and father at the close of Harold Chapin's little tragedy, "The Dumb and the Blind." And the scene between the ageing bachelor, still

striving to be young, and the life-filled flapper in the second act—I believe it's the second—of Hubert Henry Davies' "A Single Man." And the scene between the suffragette and the faun in Knoblauch's play. And the "But we thought you didn't believe in marriage" and the "Oh, but *my* case is different" scene in Fulda's translated "Our Wives." These are but the handful that come to mind at the moment. And they occurred, all of them, in commercial failures.

#### § 84

*On Nomenclature.*—While it may be true that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, it is more or less certain that it wouldn't seem to smell as sweet if it so happened that it was called a rosenberg. And while the Constitution of the United States theoretically maintains that any American-born citizen may possibly become President, it is equally more or less certain that a man with a name like Bruno Gintz or Ambrose Wiffel would stand a very poor chance of seeing the inside of the White House. Even if, indeed, the rival candidate were Josephus Daniels.

What's in a name? The question may be answered very simply. Say you are a stranger in

the city, are seized upon a remote highway with a sudden cramp, and desire to consult a physician forthwith. A mile down the street, you come upon a building in the front windows of which are visible the shingles of three doctors. The first shingle reads: "Dr. Ignatz Loos." The second shingle reads: "Dr. Hugo Gula." The third shingle reads: "Dr. John J. Smith." Which of these three doctors would get the trade of your cramp? Plainly enough, the last. Why, you will have to answer for yourself. But, however you answer, you come finally to the conclusion that the fundamental impulse that propelled you and the cramp into Dr. Smith's office was little else than the comfortable sound of Dr. Smith's name.

For those persons who believe that names mean absolutely nothing, let us make another experiment. Take, for example, a very popular romantic play like the "Romance" of Edward Sheldon. The principal characters in this play are named, respectively, Thomas Armstrong, Cornelius Van Tuyl and Margherita Cavallini. Keep the manuscript intact, with not so much as a syllable altered, but change the Thomas Armstrong into Cholmondely Tootle, the Cornelius Van Tuyl into Ralph Sprinz, and the Margherita Cavallini into Filomena Più. What success would the play have

in the way of sentimental, romantic appeal? Imagine the love scenes!

Why do theatre audiences laugh at a cheese named Gorgonzola and not at the doubly puis-sant cheese named Münster? For the same reason that they laugh at a reference to Weehawken and not at one to a neighbouring New Jersey village like Rutherford, a village intrinsically every bit as jocose as Weehawken. Why is Kalamazoo funny and the just as funny Michigan town of Marshall not funny? What makes people snicker derisively at Oshkosh and on the other hand treat with silent respect the nearby and equally comic Wisconsin hamlet of Appleton? Doubtless the same thing that caused Amelia Bingham to appreciate that if she remained Millie Smilley, as she was baptized, no one would ever accept her as an actress capable of histrionic heights more elevated than hitting a comic Irishman in the eye with a New York *Herald*.

It is as ridiculous to believe that a name means nothing to a man or woman as it would be to believe that a name means nothing to a dish of food. What theatrical producer would engage for the rôle of Romeo an actor, however talented, who was known to the world as Julius Katzenjammer? What restaurant patron would enjoy the dish half

as much if it weren't named mountain oysters? Imagine giving three lusty cheers for General Claude Vivian Pershing! More feats for the imagination. Imagine being impressed by a woman with a fireside name like Carrie Dudley (alias Mrs. Leslie Carter) in the rôle of Du Barry. Think of being impressed by Irish impersonations on the part of a girl named Blanche Minzesheimer (alias Belle Blanche). Imagine having collected cigarette pictures of Pauline Schmidgall (Pauline Hall). What if Jerome K. Jerome spelled out his middle name—Klapka? Why has Elsie Janis persistently denied with a suspicious indignation that she was born Bierbauer? How many bottles of Mary Garden Perfume would they sell if they had named it, instead, Schumann-Heink? What if the Oriental Theda Bara had stuck to her real Cincinnati, Ohio, name of Miss Goodman? Who would have listened to Billy Sunday if his name had been Max Blitz? Jacob Beer, even though he changed his name to Giacomo Meyerbeer, remains fodder for the vaudeville comics. What girl, however handsome the man and however opulent he was in the goods of the world, would enthuse over marrying him if he happened to enjoy such a name as Eliphalet Gilgal, or Joel Pecos, or Kosciusko Saus?

Rex Beach and Jack London, signed to stories of wild Alaska, are names more or less convincing. But say there were a woman who could write stories of wild Alaska very much better than these twain—whose name happened to be Gladys Darling or Mae Sunshine. What serious consideration would the poor girl get? Or say the magazine writer named Bonnie Ginger, whose work appears regularly in the Street and Smith publications, had chanced to write Andreas Latzko's "Men in War"—who would have been disturbed by it? What if the actress named Trixie Friganza had been in Edith Cavell's place, or the motion-picture girls named Arline Pretty and Louise Lovely in the places of the Congressional Jeanette Rankin and the Suffragette Pankhurst!

The theory that a name means next to nothing, and that it exercises little or no bearing upon the fortunes of its owner, is a theory akin to that which would stoutly maintain that a girl named Minnie Ohio would be as likely to impress Covent Garden as Marguerite, despite her equal talents, as the one named Mignon Nevada. There are exceptions, of course, but they prove little. For one Leo Ditrichstein who has succeeded in enchanting the matinée girl despite the influenza of his name, there have been several dozens who,

afraid to take so great a chance, have astutely turned the natal Simon into Selwyn, Lepper into Abingdon, and something or other considerably less harmonious into Courtenay. And for one Ludwig Rottenberg who has succeeded in the musical world in spite of the patronymic odour, there have been a score or more who, sensing the danger, have changed themselves from Nachtigall into Luscinus. What chance did poor Mr. O. U. Bean, who produced "An Aztec Romance" in the Manhattan Opera House six or seven years ago, stand? Even if he had revealed himself a new Gordon Craig or Reinhardt? What serious attention, in turn, would Gordon Craig ever have attracted had his name been O. U. Bean? Hash called *émince* tastes twice as good. A firm calling itself the Royal-Imperial Corset Company will sell its wares to twice as many women as it would were it to call itself by the names of its proprietors, Bierheister and Pluto, Inc. And finally, what if Rigo, the eye-rolling, lady-killing fiddler, had possessed the name Herman or Gus?

## § 85

*Opera Comique*.—The formula of opera comique: Act I—"The Boar's Head Tavern" with

the fat-legged chorus of female villagers, the King's Guard as stiff as ramrods, the hero with his shirt open at the neck, the daughter of the poor inn-keeper who hugs the footlights, closes her fists upon her bosom and blinks her way through a song called "Love is a Rose," the low comedian with the funny legs, plug hat, red nose and joke about matrimony-alimony; Act II—"The Courtyard of the Palace" with the fat-legged villagers now appearing as red-and-green gipsies, the frowzy old stock company actress with a velvet portière attached to her bustle (thus depicting a Queen), the Prince incognito, the separation of the lovers by the cruel librettist, and the low comedian with the funny legs, plug hat, red nose and joke about germs coming from Germany; Act III—"The Throne Room of the Palace," with the fat-legged first-act villagers and second-act gipsies now wearing long white sateen skirts and walking across the stage as if a loved one had just died (thus vouchsafing the yokels a regal "coronation scene"), the reunion of the lovers through the news that the hero has been pardoned, and the low comedian with the funny legs, plug hat, red nose and joke about Pittsburgh. . . .



## § 86

*Dramatic Paradox.*—Why is that theatrical audiences always laugh at the blunders of the innocently ignorant characters in drama and are moved to compassion by the blunders of the intelligent? Is this not directly opposite to the practice in actual life?

## § 87

*The French and American Taste.*—One has only to compare such a play as Harry James Smith's "The Little Teacher" with such a play as Alfred Capus' "The Little Postmistress" to sense (1) the difference between the tastes of an American and a French playwright, and (2) the difference between the tastes of an American and a French theatre audience. I doubt whether in the dramatic literatures of the two nations there are two plays, of whatever quality, that may more exactly illuminate the respective postures of these nations in their playhouses. Both plays proceed from the adventures of a spotless virgin come to earn a livelihood in a small village and each play in its subsequent progress pronounces clearly, and at every turn, the stereotyped characteristics of the

audience for which it was designed. The Capus play is a brightly written, sophisticated, good-natured and droll comedy of live and living persons. The Smith play is an amalgam of all the mildewed hokums of the Broadway showshop expounded through the figures of all the mildewed puppets of the one-night-stand opera houses. This Smith work is, indeed, a veritable *tour de force* in the so-called sure-fire devices that are ever successful in the *diteggiatura* of the keyboard of the native playgoing yokel's emotions and the pawing out of his moods *doloroso*, *infervorato*, *vivace con furioso* and *f. quanto possibile*, a *tour de force* in the yap-traps and old reliables of stage commerce that has not been matched for sheer virtuosity since George M. Cohan's "Hit-the-Trail Holliday."

The story of the play is the autobiography of the brazen popularity stratagems of the American folk stage. The picture of George Washington decorated with American flags; the picture of Woodrow Wilson beside it; drawings of the Star Spangled Banner upon the blackboard by the school children with coloured chalks; the creeping down the stairs of a small tot in its little white nightie; the sprig of Spring blossoms which the heroine gives to the hero and which the hero

tenderly presses in a book for sweet memory's sake; the drunken father who beats his children until the "purple welts" show on their backs; the twain of sour old maiden ladies who seek to stir up the community against the little school teacher because they believe her relations with the hero are not so innocent as they seem; the uncouth but whole-hearted lumber-jack to whom the little school teacher teaches the A B C's and with whom she falls in love; the head of the village school board whose bandanna protrudes from the tails of his coat; the heroine's wistful playing of the organ in the candle-light with the children in their nighties cuddling beside her—the organ that hasn't been played, it's nigh on thirty years now, sence the baby died . . . they are all here. And with them, the village beau in the loud red vest who wets his fingers and creases his trousers; the hero who fells with a blow the knave who casts an aspersion upon the little school teacher's fair name; the kettle of boiling water with the real steam coming out of it; the joke about Jersey City; the discovery that the ill-used children were kidnapped from their cradles and are in reality the heirs of a rich New York family; the comic old rube who goes on talking forgetting that he has a lighted match in his hand and burns his fingers; the hero

who says "damn" and then, when the heroine raises her eyebrows, elaborately begs her pardon; the pale little girl child who observes pathetically that she "never had no muvver"; the longing to be back again in "wonderful little old New York"; the final vision of the hero in khaki . . . and you have, in small part, an idea of the night's indubious traffic.

When one sees "The Little Teacher," one sees synchronously the history of our American popular stage. It is a vaudeville of American audiences since 1870 and, as such, the best unintentional theatrical satire I have ever seen.

### § 88

*Temperature and the Drama.*—Of the numerous delusions that enwrap the theatre, not the least amusing is the hypothesis that the summer season is suited vastly better to music shows than to drama because the former, in warm uncomfortable weather, place considerably less strain upon the attention of the spectator than the latter. The truth, of course, despite its regrettable air of flippancy, is quite the opposite. A music show like "The Follies," say, with its seventy or eighty comely girls, with its every fifteen minute change

of multicoloured costume and brilliant scenery, and with its quickly shifting panorama of dance, tune and spectacle, invites the attention with a ten-fold more close alertness than a drama like St. John Ervine's "John Ferguson," for instance, with its seven or eight characters, its very slow action, its leisurely development of thesis.

The managerial assumption that the music show provides the better form of hot weather entertainment because it calls for a lesser sense-organic agility on the part of the spectator than does the dramatic show vouchsafes us a not inaccurate measure of the peculiarly bogus managerial metaphysic. Placing the cart before the horse with his accustomed perspicacity, the manager argues from the success of the music show in hot weather—and from the reciprocal failure of drama in the same weather—that the music show is successful because it appeals to the spectator's indolent hot weather mood, when the fact is that the music show appeals to the spectator in hot weather—as the drama does not—purely and simply because in hot weather the average man is of twice as active a disposition and of twice as alert a nature as in cold weather, and because the music show thus satisfies his doubly acute senses. In the summer months the average man

who in the winter months hugs the radiator and the easy chair is fond of exerting himself. The activity he abjures in the cold season he adopts with a furious suddenness and enthusiasm in the warm season. Though he may be anything but athletic, the warm weather sees him golfing, walking, swimming, bathing in the surf, playing tennis, gardening, climbing hills and mountains, hurrying to and from railroad stations, fishing, commuting twice a day, working like a dog cooking his own meals and washing dishes in some sort of "camp," going on long bucolic hikes, spending weeks stalking the mythical bear in the Maine woods, rowing his arms lame at Lake Mahopac, falling out of canoes into the Hudson River or pitching hay for diversion in Westchester County. The very mention of such exotic didoes would make him grunt a sour grunt during the winter; but, come summer with its wilting heat, and he becomes abruptly and surprisingly as active as a cootie. It is this grotesque and wayward hot weather zeal that brings him to the desire for a more lively form of theatrical entertainment than slow-paced drama. When the warm weather comes, his peculiarly restless nature wants action, change, something to rivet the attention, to provoke the emotions and the senses, to hold the eye. And the music show

serves this end. He strains his too long inert body by day and, suddenly avid of life, he wishes to balance the strain by a hard pull at his other faculties by night. And if he is not of the sort that relishes the physical strain of sport, he naturally relishes doubly, and wants doubly, the equivalent and compensatory emotional strain provided by the theatre. Drama would rest him and cause him to relax, and he doesn't want rest or relaxation. He wants to have a smashing colour, a dazzling parade, a ceaseless movement, lithographed upon the combined bíchromated gelatin and albumen of his nervous and vigilant brain. He wants, not an inert, passive and too easily assimilated depiction of the tragic psychoneurological phenomena underlying filial and maternal love as set forth in some such drama as Hervieu's "Passing of the Torch," but the active, absorbing and every-moment intriguing and riveting kaleidoscope of bewildering motion.

The problem is a simple one in practical psychology, familiar to every Harvard sophomore. It is fully explained by Wundt, Külpe and James in their respective writings on the nature and forms of attention, and by Ribot ("Psychologie de l'Attention"), A. J. Hamlin in the *American Journal of Psychology*, Flournoy ("L'Année Psycholo-

gique”), and the very sagacious Exner. . . . This, therefore, the reason why “The Follies” is inevitably twenty times as prosperous a hot weather show as would be the best drama Pinero ever wrote.

### § 89

*The Marionette.*—For the dramatist, the marionette surpasses the living actor in the same way that, for the composer, the violin surpasses the living singer. For all the wood out of which the marionette, like the violin, is fashioned, that wood contains in each instance the potential voice of the thousand and one inspirations of the creative artist. Unlike flesh and blood and the whims and idiosyncrasies and contumacies that go more or less inevitably with flesh and blood, it serves the creative artist with all the obedience and docility of his pen, with all the expository force of the lead that is in cold type. The critic of the marionette is the critic who believes that the human voice of Schumann-Heink is capable of bringing as great a glory to the “Heidenröslein” of Schubert as the wooden voice of Antonio Stradivari, or that the visible nose, Adam’s apple and Chianti-bottle figure of Mr. Robert B. Mantell constitute a grander and more beautiful funnel for the majestic



verse of Shakespeare than the shrewdly negotiated combination of a trained and mellifluous larynx in the wings and a visible wooden figure finely carved by the painstaking hand of an artist of Bologna.

The "Scheherazade" of the Russian ballet, the richest flower of pantomime and in its silence as vibrantly dramatic as the most strepitantly voiced drama, is in essence drama expounded by marionettes. The "Voice in the Wilderness," the off-stage voice of God, in the dramatic presentation of the Biblical "Book of Job," contributes at once the most effective and dramatic note of the play. Is, then, the theory of the marionette drama—intrinsically a combination of these twain—so absurd as some contend? . . . What living, speaking actor could be half so effective, half so revelatory, half so eloquent as Pinero's little marionette that gayly dances down the curtain to the second act of "A Wife Without a Smile"? What living, speaking actress could conjure up for the imagination the vision of a Jenny Mere as that vision might be conjured up by a delicate waxen doll responding to the golden, always-sixteen off-stage voice of a shrivelled Bernhardt of sixty?

If there are certain plays that, in good truth, cannot perhaps be so electrically played by ma-

rionettes as by living actors—plays of sex emotionalism, for instance—there are no less certain plays that cannot be so electrically played by living actors as by marionettes. The so-called drama of ideas, for example, is essentially and properly a marionette drama: the living actor not only contributes nothing to it; he actually by his presence detracts from it. Lucien Guitry as Pasteur in the play of that name is less Pasteur than the familiar Lucien Guitry playing Chantecler in a Prince Albert. It thus becomes necessary for the proper effect of the play that the spectator, in Coleridge's phrase, strain to support the illusion not by judging Guitry to be Pasteur, but by remitting the judgment that Guitry is not Pasteur. This "temporary half-faith supported by the spectator's voluntary contribution," this mental ruse and imaginative tug—this a marionette in the rôle of Pasteur would not call for, since (1) the rôle of Pasteur as written by the younger Guitry is primarily a mere spigot for the projection of scientific ideas and contentions, since (2) a living interpreter of the rôle, however able, by virtue of his familiar and largely inalienable aspect and comportment serves as a somewhat grotesque sieve, and since (3), therefore, the marionette, being obviously a marionette, would rid the spectator of

the devastating sieve consciousness and, interposing no alien physiological element and call for temporary half-faith, would bring the spectator without ado into direct contact with the aforesaid scientific ideas and contentions. The difference, somewhat less gaseously expressed, is the difference between watching August Fraemcke excite the F minor concerto of Chopin on a Steinway and listening to the ghost of Paderewski perform the same composition on a Welte-Mignon.

Well, well, I probably exaggerate. Nor do I pretend that I am myself yet convinced. But, perusing the anti-marionette logic of the mummer worshippers, my doubts and hesitations are somewhat moderated. If there is much to be said on the one side, there is much also to be said on the other.

### § 90

*The National Humour.*—Were I asked by a foreigner to point out the most searchingly exact and typical—if true enough not always the best—specimens of the American national humour, I should direct the inquisitor to the legend postcards on sale for a penny apiece in corner cigar stores throughout the country. Nowhere else, I conclude after considerable deliberation, is the unique

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and characteristic humour of the United States so clearly presented, so clearly illustrated, so clearly summarized. Search the libraries of America from end to end and one will be at pains to find a shrewder and better anthology than is revealed upon these mailing-cards. I quote a few more or less familiar examples, selected at random:

1. "What! You never kissed any girl before? Then you beat it! You are not gonna practise on me."
2. "After talking with some people, without mentioning any names, I wonder at the high price of ivory."
3. "Don't criticize the butter—yer may be old yerself some day."
4. "I'm somewhat of a liar myself—but go on with your story; I'm listening."
5. "I'm so unlucky that if it was raining soup I'd be right there with a fork."
6. "Some men will do more for a cheap cigar than they will for a dollar."
7. "Don't spit. Remember the Johnstown Flood!"
8. "A tea-kettle sings when it's full of water. But who the hell wants to be a tea-kettle?"
9. "Life is one damn thing after another. Love is two damn things after each other."
10. "I've met both your gentlemen friends, and I don't know which one I like the worst."
11. "Kiss me quick, kid; I'm going to eat onions."
12. "If you have nothing to do, don't do it here."
13. "Come in without knocking. Go out the same way."

14. "If you spit on the floor at home, spit on the floor here. We want you to feel at home."
15. "Take things easy. You can always go to jail."
16. "Don't swear while here. Not that we care a damn, but it sounds like hell to strangers."
17. "If every man was as true to his country as he is to his wife, God save the U. S. A."
18. "You can't fool nature. That's why so many prohibitionists have red noses."
19. "The peacock is a beautiful bird, but it takes the stork to deliver the goods."
20. "Don't say mean things to your mother-in-law. . . . Kick her in the slats."
21. "What! *You* here again? Another half-hour gone to hell!"
22. "Half the world is nutty—the rest are squirrels."
23. "I ain't got nothing to live for; nobody loves me but the dog, and he's got fleas."
24. "A baby doesn't know much, but father can't wear mother's nightgown and fool it when it's hungry."
25. "Calves may come and cows may go, but the bull goes on forever."
26. "I love my patent leather, but oh you undressed kid."
27. "I may be no chicken, but I'm game."
28. "Any fool can go to bed, but getting up takes a man!"
29. "Our eyes have met, our lips not yet, but oh you kid, I'll get you yet."
30. "An Irishman dies everytime they're short an angel in Heaven."

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Not a tony, an elegant, humour perhaps—but nevertheless a humour sharply typical of the present day American people: as typical in its way as is the humour of *Le Rire*, Maillol and Rip of the French, the humour of Seymour Hicks, *Tit-Bits* and the New Cross Empire of the British, or the humour of Busch, the side-street Tingel-Tangel and Georg Okonkowski of the German. The national humour of America, like that of any other nation save Spain and possibly France, is in the main its lowest and most vulgar humour. Thus, the satirical humour of George Ade—the finest American humour of our time—is no more accurately the weather-cock of the American national chuckle than the high satirical humour of Anatole France is the divining-rod of the French, or the striking satirical humour of Ludwig Thoma that of the German, or the smart satirical humour of Max Beerbohm that of the British. The national humour is obviously enough the humour not of the few, but of the mass—the plurality humour. And thus the humour most typical of the American people is the humour of the beer saloon, the scenic railway pleasure park, the country fair, the day coach smoking car, the street-corner, the chowder club picnic, the political

rally, the baseball bleachers. The humour of any nation is the humour of its leading bartender. The humour of England is assuredly typified vastly less by the reply of a W. S. Gilbert to the question of what he thought of Dickens—"He was, if you understand me, a gentish person"—than by some such punning allusion of Arthur Wimperis as General Haig and Haig or Admiral Jellycake. The humour of Germany is not of the stuff of Bismarck's reply when they asked him how he would settle the Irish problem—"I would have the Irish and the Dutch exchange countries: the Dutch would make a garden of Ireland, and in a year or so the Irish would begin neglecting the dikes"—but of the stuff of some such music-hall "Jupplala" lyric whence was derived the American "My wife's gone to the country, hooray, hooray!" And the national humour of France, though probably of a suaver quality than that of the other nations here considered, since France, after all, is metropolitan Paris and metropolitan Paris France, is measurably less the gorgeous humour of "The Revolt of the Angels" than that of the well-known comic boulevard picture with the appended inscription, "Is this Monsieur Calchot that I have the pleasure of addressing?"

In England and on the Continent, the character-

istic humour of a nation is the humour of its music-halls. The humour of the Alhambra, the Victoria Palace and the Camberwell Empire is as certain a thermometer of the British humour as that of the Folies-Bergère, the Olympia, the Bobino and the Gaité-Montparnesse is a thermometer of the French, and that of the Wintergarten, the Fledermaus cabaret platform and the Nollendorfplatz-Theater of the German. But the representative humour of the American people is, I believe, the humour of the cheap vaudevilles and the burlesque show. It is this humour that the post-cards which I have described reflect: for in the cheap vaudevilles and the burlesque shows one finds, indeed, this humour's provenience. The humour of the burlesque show is a humour original with the burlesque show: it is an even more original humour than that of the cheap vaudevilles which is often a mere slight polishing up of the burlesque humour or a mere roughening and toughening up of the already thrice distilled Broadway musical comedy humour. And this burlesque humour therefore doubtless places a more accurate finger upon the national pulse. The loudest and most popular laughter in the American theatres of today is provoked by humour that has been graduated from burlesque. The leading comedians of a dozen or



more shows of uniformly high prosperity throughout the country have come to the more august stage from burlesque, and have brought their wheezes with them. The exceptionally popular humour of Irvin Cobb is substantially the humour of the burlesque show, somewhat refined for the purposes of general distribution in a periodical that rolls a canny eye at the papa and his housewife. The most popular *mot* negotiated by President Wilson on his speech route of 1918, the joke about making the world safe for the democratic party, originated with the comedian in Charlie Baker's "Gay Morning Glories" show. Helen Green's admirable actors' boarding house and telephone girls' humour—some of the very best native humour an American has set upon paper—was in essence the purest burlesque show humour.

The satiric humour of George Ade, though, as observed, probably the best American humour since the time of Twain, is generically less an American than a British humour. On the surface it is as American as a catcher's mit; its general form and style are as thoroughly American as Stein-Bloch clothes; but in its amazingly sharp satire it is British. Ade's training and upbringing, contrary to the general notion, were—I understand from a source that seems thoroughly reliable

—less along banks of the Wabash lines than along banks of the Thames lines. (His father, so I hear, was of English stock and stubbornly read no other newspaper than the London *Telegraph*, for which he regularly subscribed.) The fine English satiric note in the son's writings may thus be explained. Whatever the facts, the one fact remains that the humour of George Ade is intrinsically no more a symptom of the national humour than the vastly less fine but partly satiric writing of Charles Hoyt was, in his day, intrinsically a symptom of the national humour. The present-day American mass humour is not the sly humour of Ade, but the somewhat less *recherché* humour of Billy Watson ("baggy comedian's clothes, toothpick in his mouth, red nose, cuffs tied with ribbons, hatchet in his hip pocket," so Arthur Ruhl describes him in that droll and excellent essay)—of Billy Watson and his venerable and deathless "Krausmeyer's Alley." Just as the twenty-year-ago sly American humour of Hoyt was less the national humour of its day than the somewhat less *recherché* humour of this selfsame Watson and this selfsame "Krausmeyer's Alley." (A nation's humour is in general as unchanging as a nation's flag—a few more stars, or a few more asterisks, perhaps, but Watson's current immensely popular addendum to

"Krausmeyer's Alley," "A Gay Old Boy," is nothing other than Harry Montague's famous "My Uncle" of a quarter of a century ago, the lucrative and nationally applauded standby of Waldron's old Trocadero Burlesquers.)

The American national humour is not the derisory humour of the Twains and the Ades, but the burlesque humour of the Petroleum V. Nasbys and the Irvin Cobbs. The humour of Ring Lardner comes nearer the national pulse than the humour of Montague Glass, say, yet both these humours are intrinsically of too fine and subtle a left-handed quality, too sharp and incisive a power of characterization—especially the humour of the latter—to bring them into a plurality of popularity. The national humour is the low, broad, easy, vulgar humour that appeals alike to the Elk and the member of the Union Club, the motorman and the owner of a Rolls-Royce, the congressman and the chiropodist, the Y. M. C. A. superintendent and the brothel keeper, the artist and the shoe clerk: the humour that tickles alike the ribs of ignoramus and intellectual, of rich and poor, of rowdy and genteel, of black, white and tan. And where other than in burlesque do we find this humour in America? Whether spoken humour or physical humour, this burlesque humour—reg-

ularly graduated to the more legitimate popular stage, to the popular magazines, to the popular songs and books and moving pictures, and so given a thorough national circulation—is more often than any other form of American humour successful in amusing the generality of the American people. Thus, for one American who will laugh at some such delicate mockery of Clyde Fitch's as "Men are always hard on another man whom women like," ten thousand will laugh at some such burlesque show fancy as Krausmeyer's injunction to Grogan to take his feet off the table "and give the Limburger a chance." And for every American, rich or poor, black or white, Christian or Quartermaster, who will be found to laugh at some such literary drollery as Christopher Morley's account of the lecturer on Tennyson who by error got into a home for female inebriates, there will be found thirty thousand who will laugh at some such burlesque drollery as Al Reeves' account of his adventures in urging the Salvation Army saviour of fallen women to save him two blondes and a brunette for Saturday night.

The true fundamental national humour of America—as of any other nation—rests, of course, in its dirty story. The loose and ribald anecdote of the Irishman and the minister's

daughter, of what was seen through the opera-glass from the veranda of the Hebrew golf club, of the widow and the college boy, of the girl who went to the masked ball as a certain playing card, and the like, constitute the N toward which the national popular humour compass needle constantly and unswervingly directs itself. And it is because the burlesque show humour more closely and brazenly than any other public form of American humour approaches to this shall we say deplorable index, that it vouchsafes the most accurate public picture of the American national humour. This burlesque humour, further, is of typical American accent and expression, as the burlesque show itself is a typical American product: one will not find the like of it anywhere in the world. And this is why the alien investigator, would he know the best available criterion of the American scherzo, would rightly and most appropriately be directed to a study of that form of American public entertainment whose humour most intimately and unabashedly dances the bump-polka with what is the actual national humour.

The humour of the burlesque show—the genuine, full-blown and unaffected burlesque show of Fourteenth Street, not the hybrid thing mani-

cured by the so-called burlesque wheel for the up-town Columbia Theatre of Broadway—this humour is as representatively and intrinsically American, in all the fine bloom of its vulgarity, as the humour of the comic valentine, the pie cinema or the bush league bleachers. Its essence is the essence of the nationally most popular comic cartoons as, for example, the “Boobs,” “Simps,” “Foolish Questions,” “No Brains” and “Mike and Ike” of Goldberg, the Hallroom Boys of McGill, the Mutt and Jeff of Bud Fisher, the “Bringing Up Father” of George McManus, the “Abie the Agent” of Hersfield—and the Yellow Kid of Outcalt, and Foxy Grandpa, and the Katzenjammer Kids, and the various celebrated comic strips of the yesterdays. For one American who laughs at the pungent, satiric drawings of Webster or Hill or McCutcheon, there are ten thousand who laugh at the low burlesque stage sketches of Tad, of Oppen, and of T. E. Powers.

*Puck* was successful only so long as it stuck to the barber-shop level: the day it attempted a more elevated form of wit the office boy began figuring how much the editor's spittoon would go for at the auction sale. *Life* sticks sagaciously to mother-in-law and Little Willie jokes and so keeps alive. *Judge* sticks to yokel limericks about the

man who lived in Siam and pictures of dogs with cans tied to their tails and thus keeps its head above water. The United States has not one humorous periodical of one-half the quality of the British *Punch*, or one-tenth the quality of the French *Vie Parisienne*, the Russian *Loukomorye* and *Novi Satirikon* and *Boudilnik*, or the German *Simplicissimus*. The American comic paper reflects the highest popular level of the American taste in humour as exactly as such a periodical as the *Saturday Evening Post*, with its two millions of circulation and its five millions of readers, reflects the highest popular level of the American taste in philosophy and æsthetics.

As, theatrically, "Krausmeyer's Alley" may be accepted as a typical example of the American humour, so many "La Cocotte Bleue," the Cluny Theatre riot, be accepted as an emblem of the French humour, and "A Little Bit of Fluff," the dismal American failure, as an emblem of the British, and an eternally popular Laufs and Kraatz collaboration as an emblem of the German. The American humour, more than the British, or French, or even German, is a slapstick and seltzer siphon humour. It is the humour of "Dere Mable," of "Speaking of Operations," of K. C. B., of comedians speaking into telephones and receiv-

ing faces full of flour, of William F. Kirk, and of Barney Gerard kicking Rose Sydell in the seat of her tights. It is the humour of the Silk Hat Harry cartoons, of such songs as "How're We Gonna Keep the Boys on the Farm After They Been to Gay Paree?", of postcards bearing the inscription "Say, bo, get me! You're bughouse," of Louis Robie and the bass drum and ratchet and suggestively torn strip of muslin. It is, in brief, less the humour of the ironic Harry Leon Wilson, or of the observant Kin Hubbard, or of the J. L. Morgan of the shrewd club lampoons, or of the F. P. Adams of parody classic verse, or of the quaintly philosophical E. W. Howe, or of the museful Clare Briggs than the humour of the Yonkers *Statesman*, "Bugs" Baer, Dinkelspiel, the Charlie Chaplin inserts, Joe Oppenheimer's "Broadway Belles," Roy L. McCardell, Ezra Kendall, Bert Leslie, and the one about the cigar drummer and the blonde.

## § 91

*The Crook Play.*—The modern Broadway crook play, commonly held to be as typical and characteristic an American product as a Muhlenberg College bachelor of arts or the Mann Act, is actually no more indigenously Ameri-



can than Nápravnik's "Dubroffsky." The modern Broadway crook play is a lineal descendant of the Germano-Austro-Hungarian crook play: its blood relationship is more or less visible in its every feature. The American Carters and Marcins with their "Master Minds" and "Cheating Cheaters" were in each instance anticipated by the Austro-Hungarian Sawa Zez-Mirskis with their "Super-Scoundrels" (*Der Obergauener*) and "Cheated Cheaters" (*Betrogene Betrüger*), as the American Armstrongs and McHughs with their card-sharper "Greyhounds" and burlesque "Officers 666" were in each instance anticipated by the Central European Karl Schülers with their "Card Sharpers" (*Falschspieler*) and Turzinsky-Stifters with their burlesque "Don't Write Letters" (*Mann Soll Keine Briefe Schreiben*). The Broadway crook melodrama composer like Willard Mack has always had a crook melodrama papa overseas like Kurt Matull; the Broadway crook farce composer like James Montgomery a crook farce papa like Ferenc Molnar. The Americans have in none of these cases been plagiarists—this is not the point—but the species of crook plays which they have written were in each case already familiar to and popular with the Central European audience.

Not only in America but in Europe is the crook

play, when it is done with a reasonable show of skill, among the most prosperous and lucrative of the numerous theatrical jay baits. The theory of the local college critics that the high popularity of the crook drama in America is a melancholy mark of the inferior American theatrical taste is a theory that suffers a swift bump when the Continental (and particularly the French) statistics are plumbed.

## § 92

*The Theatrical Wise Men.*—Probably no other institution on earth is burdened with so many positive theories and rules of conduct as the theatre. And in probably no other institution, save it be a physical culture diet restaurant, are the positive theories and rules of conduct so profitably to be violated. The moment an oracular theory or law is laid down in the theatre, that moment does it become certain that by breaking it someone is due shortly to make at least a quarter of a million dollars.

A. H. Woods, probably the shrewdest commercial manager in the American theatre, rejected a ridiculously cheap advance offer of a sixty per cent interest in the melodrama named "The Unknown Purple" on the contention that the play con-

tained a situation in which a wife failed to recognize her husband after an absence of eight or ten years, which situation, Mr. Woods informed the author of the play, would never conceivably be accepted as credible by a theatre audience. "The Unknown Purple," with the situation, thereupon proceeded to run for an entire theatrical year in New York City alone.

When Arthur Hopkins announced that he was about to produce "The Jest," this same canny Mr. Woods voiced his conviction that so sombre a tragedy could not conceivably draw more than a very limited "highbrow" audience, as he termed it, and could not consequently play to "big money." The sombre "Jest" thereupon promptly turned out to be the greatest financial dramatic success in many years, playing to the astonishingly high box-office sale of over nineteen thousand dollars a week.

George M. Cohan, who probably knows more about popular playmaking than all the rest of the popular American playwrights combined, has said in answer to an interviewer's query: "If you want to sell anything to Americans, sell them what they want. That goes for pants or plays. And give them what they want quick! Shoot it over fast! Tell your story so sharply that it will keep your audience awake all the time following you! Get

a plot and get it going at once! Don't give the audience time to think!" Mr. Cohan rejected the manuscript of "Peg o' My Heart" on the ground that it moved too deliberately, that its story was not shot over with sufficient punch and speed, that its plot maneuvering was so slow that an audience would have too much time to think about it and that, therefore, it would fail to hold an American audience. "Peg o' My Heart" thereupon began a record-breaking run that is still going on in the remote tank towns and that has netted its author and manager a great fortune.

Augustus Thomas, the leading American apostle and professor of absolutism in dramatic technique—in the theory that in order to succeed a drama must be written according to hard and fast, tested and inviolable, formulæ—laboriously confected "The Copperhead" according to the said formulæ and then found, upon the third night of its successful New York presentation, that it was necessary to the perpetuation of the play's success to turn the chief principle of his main formula topsy-turvy. Thus the first night enigma of Milt Shanks' loyalty to the Federal government was on the third night imparted to the audience in a hoarse down-stage whisper by the rewritten Milt himself.

Daniel Arthur hesitated to produce Clare Kum-

mer's "Good Gracious Annabelle" as a music show libretto because it was, he maintained, too absurd a fable too artificially handled. Hopkins thereupon obtained the rights to the libretto from Arthur, impudently produced the libretto as a straight farce comedy without any music at all, and got away with it.

These are five cases out of an available five hundred.

### § 93

*William Winter.*—Re-reading the bulky *opera* of the late William Winter, I am impressed more than ever with the utter incompetence of the man as a critic of the drama. A writer of many a felicitous phrase and fruity turn of sentence, he was yet of the mind of a schoolboy, of the point of view of a girl disappointed in love. Of his grotesque morality and puritanism in matters of art, I do not speak: these are of course familiar. What I speak of was the man's almost complete lack of understanding of the fundamental requirements of criticism. He was a critic of acting and drama in precisely the same sense that the late William S. Devery was a critic of sociology. His attitude was generally the attitude of a Simon Legree without

slaves. Perpetually vexed, irritated, infuriated, he would wildly brandish his cowhide about him, would have at imaginary ghosts that were constantly terrorizing him and, finding the ghosts made of thin air, would suffer upon his own ear the boomerang sting of the whip. Dancing then and howling over the self-inflicted fetch, he would seek to get even with the whip by loudly calling it a rattlesnake. And it was this imprecation that was duly set upon paper and called criticism.

If I seem to be indelicate in writing thus of a dead man, I have no shuffling apologies to make. The fact that Winter is dead doesn't increase my respect for him in the slightest. And though I hope that the good Lord God may rest the soul of him in eternal peace, I can't resist the conviction—come upon me since carefully re-reading his works—that the mark of the man as a critic of the theatre was best to be appraised in his acceptance of public benefit alms, in the dour midnight of his life, from the very actors whom he had labelled dramatic *maquereaux* and the very actresses whom his pale blue New England mind had denounced as no better than harlots. It is to the credit of Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske that she alone—of all who were sought to play the hypocrite to such a

man in his doddering, financially wrecked days—remained a sufficiently acute critic of critics to show the committee the door.

§ 94

*Sex Appeal.*—The disappointingly small measure of popular success achieved by the woman who is agreed to be the best actress on the native stage, a regular topic for speculation where critics of the theatre are gathered together, is not so difficult of explanation as it would seem to be. The woman in question, an unusually able player and one further endowed with a musical speaking voice and more than the average share of comeliness, is yet utterly devoid of the sex appeal essential to success on the popular dramatic stage. This observation would, in faith, be trite enough were it not for the fact that the deficiency (doubtless thoroughly recognized by the excellent actress herself) has never to my knowledge been attributed to her even by her least friendly critics. And yet, pin down her admirers and disfavoureds one by one, riddle their elaborately profound professorisms, and one finds that in the subconscious nook of each there hides, politely veiled in academic flim-flam, this simple icicle truth.

The actress who thus, albeit indirectly, impresses an audience, though she be the greatest actress in her nation, will ever remain a popular failure. The yokel sees never the rôle interpreted by the actress, but the actress interpreted by the woman. It is nonsense to say, as they do say, that this or that stage young woman is New York's or Cleveland's or Kansas City's favourite actress. It is more accurate to say that the young woman, whoever she happens to be, is New York's or Cleveland's or Kansas City's favourite stage young woman. When the Senior Class at Yale or Harvard thinks it is voting for its favourite actress, it is actually voting for the girl it would individually like best to take out to supper. Allen and Ginter did not sell cigarettes by putting in their packets pictures of actresses as actresses—imagine the yokels collecting photographs of Mrs. Sarah Cowell Lemoyne as the Dowager Duchess de Coutras!—but by putting in pictures of actresses as women with good shapes and as girls with naughty dimples and soulful eyes. To believe that the yokel cuts out half-tones of an actress and pastes them on the wall over his bed because he venerates the actress for her histrionic virtuosity is to believe that the editor scholastically puts them in his magazine for the same reason.



## § 95

*The Pigeon-Hole Play.*—The most ignorant criticism visited upon a play in my memory was that accorded Zoë Akins' "Papa" on its New York presentation. Confounded by something not duly listed in the pigeon-holes, the gentlemen of the press promptly concluded that the author had failed in her attempt to write a kind of play that was listed in the pigeon-holes when, of course, what the author had tried plainly to do was to write a kind of play that was not listed in the pigeon-holes. Whether she failed to do this in sound fashion, or whether she succeeded, is beside the point. The point is that she was criticized not for what she tried to do—whether, as I say, the accomplishment was good or bad—but for what she deliberately tried not to do. To take to the criticism of a play like "Papa" a "Turn to the Right" mind and a "Three Faces East" technical appraisal is to shop at a florist's for beefsteak. It is much as if one were indignantly to criticize Culmbacher for its lack of palliative massage properties or a horse liniment for its taste.

## § 96

*The Actor and the Trained Seal.*—I trust that I am not unduly pessimistic, yet it seems to me that

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each year the quality of acting in the American theatre grows progressively worse. Save in the instance of a half-dozen or so men and a half-dozen or so women, the bulk of acting becomes each season more slovenly, more uncouth, more absurdly incompetent. That the actors themselves are wholly to blame for this, I doubt. The average actor, true enough, brings to his profession not one-half the equipment that a fairly good barber brings to his; and the average actress is ready to call it quits when she has learned how to pronounce three or four French words and to sit down without automatically throwing her right leg over her left. But despite this it seems to me that, though the job were akin to driving nails into cobblestones, these droll curios might yet be polished up a bit and improved if there existed producers who knew how to do the polishing and the improving. That the average actor is willing to be helped, I haven't the slightest doubt. But that the average producer knows how to help him, I doubt seriously.

The producer makes the mistake of believing his job done when he hires the actor. His job, in reality, has then just begun. When the producer becomes indignant over the incompetence of the actor he has hired, he becomes foolish. He has not hired competence, though he is ever fond of deluding

himself with the tradition and hope that he has; he has hired merely a large hunk of more or less sensitive and impressionable wax. To expect this clod to perform its work of its own accord is to expect a phonograph to play without a needle, a record and considerable winding. If the acting on the American stage grows worse year by year, it is because the producers have taken more and more for granted the theory that the average actor knows something about his work. The average actor knows no more about his work than the average reader on the staff of a magazine knows about his work. He knows that he mustn't stop to blow his nose in the middle of a hot love scene, that he must refrain from spitting on Aubrey Tanqueray's rug and that he must look up the pronunciation of the word "coniomycetus"—just as the magazine reader knows that he mustn't bother the editor with stories about the beautiful, seductive, mysterious Fifi Pommard, alias Sophie Bohnensalat, the German spy—but, like the reader, he knows very little else. Of imagination, initiative, critical analysis, artistic derring-do, neither vouchsafes a trace.

If an actor gives a bad performance the fault is the producing director's, just as if a trained seal gives a bad performance the fault is the trainer's.

The director who, upon finding an actor, perfunctorily takes for granted the actor's ability to do the right thing at the right moment is akin to the trainer who, upon finding a seal, perfunctorily takes for granted the seal's ability to intertwine the French and American flags at the right moment. The actor is not an independent body and mind, a creature of invention and resolve: he is a mere mechanical instrument. He is the keyboard upon which the producer plays the playwright's tunes. He is to creative art what the nickelodeon is to De Pachmann. The producer who confidently regards him otherwise is like the street urchin who fondly hopes to start the slot piano going merely by shaking it.

## § 97

*The Middle-Class Taste.*—It is a common dud-geon of the American professor-critics of the drama that the low grade of American theatrical entertainment is due to the low taste of the American middle-class theatrical audience. Elevate the taste of this middle-class, rid the auditorium of the artistic and æsthetic predilections of our stock-brokers, haberdashers, clothing salesmen, moving-picture actors and other such mental and social octoroons, and—they say—you will coincidentally

and simultaneously elevate the quality of American drama.

Let us suppose that this middle-class and its plebeian taste were completely and summarily removed from the American theatre and its erstwhile loges occupied by, let us say, the aristocrats of Europe and the aristocratic taste of Europe—in direct example, let us further say, the aristocratic taste of Great Britain. What would be the result? Surveying the statistics of royalty's attendance upon the London theatre during the last twelve years, we find that what this aristocratic and cultivated taste chiefly patronized and relished was as follows:

Feb. 12, 1907—His Majesty the King, accompanied by the Queen, visited the Apollo and saw "The Stronger Sex," a third-rate popular comedy by John Valentine.

Feb. 19, 1907—The Royal couple went to Wyndham's and saw "When Knights Were Bold," a fourth-rate flash-back romantic play the success of which was due to the low comedy, slapstick antick-ing of the actor James Welch in the rôle of Sir Guy de Vere.

June 26, 1907—They visited the Adelphi to see the ancient rube ruffler, "The Corsican Brothers."

July 18, 1907—They went to the Vaudeville to

see the adapted French farce, "Mrs. Ponderbury's Past."

The King, while in Paris the same year without the Queen, attended "Vous n'Avez Rien à Déclarer" and "La Puce à l'Oreille," two particularly hot ones, both at the Nouveautés, and Bernstein's "The Thief." While the King was away, the Queen took in Hall Caine's "The Bondman," "Raffles," "Miss Hook of Holland," the variety show at the Palace, "The Great Conspiracy," "The Belle of Mayfair"—and went a second time to see both "The Stronger Sex" and James Welch's monkeyshines.

The Prince and Princess of Wales during this season took in "The Stronger Sex" and "Sinbad the Sailor," a Drury Lane extravaganza.

In 1908, I find that the aristocratic taste went in for "A White Man" (called "The Squaw Man" in this country); "Diana of Dobson's," the Cicely Hamilton shopgirl romance; the naughty farce "Dear Old Charlie"; the patriotic military flag-wagger hight "The Flag Lieutenant"; "Marriages of Mayfair," a Cecil Raleigh-Henry Hamilton Drury Lane melodrama; "Lady Barbarity," an R. C. Carton masterpiece; "Her Father" (twice), a prototype of the Broadway play called "The Rainbow"; "The Gay Gordons," "The Belle of Brit-

tany," "The King of Cadonia," "Havana" and similar song and dance shows; the venerable "Lyons Mail"; "The Sway Boat," by W. T. Coleby, and "The Early Worm," a laborious farce by Frederick Lonsdale. The command performances in this year were "The Flag Lieutenant," "The Corsican Brothers," "The Duke's Motto" and Alfred Sutro's "Builder of Bridges."

The following year saw the King twice taking in the Drury Lane melodrama called "The Whip." The King also went to see "An Englishman's Home," a yellow journal melopiece; "Arsène Lupin," a detective play; "The Woman in the Case," a Clyde Fitch melodrama attributed to Theodore Kremer; a third-rate farce named "Mr. Preedy and the Countess," subsequently done at the Maxine Elliott Theatre in this country; a couple of obscure "society plays" by obscure writers; and a couple of leg shows in which the pretty Phyllis Dare was appearing. The taste of the King was concurred in by the Prince and Princess of Wales and, save in the case of a vaudeville show at the Alhambra, by the Queen. "The Lyons Mail" was one of the command performances.

In 1910, the King elected Isabel Jay and "The Balkan Princess," Lily Elsie and "The Dollar Princess," Gertie Millar and "Our Miss Gibbs," to-

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gether with "Alias Jimmy Valentine," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "The House of Temperley," "Tantalizing Tommy" and a Chauncey Olcott opus called "The O'Flynn." The next four years found Royalty attending in the main Bulwer Lytton's "Money" (a command performance in honour of the visit of the German Emperor and the German Empress!), the Robert Hichens Valeska Suratt *conte* "Bella Donna," the Horace Annesley Vachell potboiler "Jelf's," the coloured moving pictures at the Scala, Charles Klein's "Third Degree" at the Garrick, James Montgomery's Broadway crook farce "Ready Money," the suggestive French farce "The Glad Eye" (here called "The Zebra" in the Paul Potter adaptation), Cicely Courtneidge in the "Princess Caprice" music show, the song and dance shows called "The Girl in the Taxi" and "The Dancing Mistress," the movie "Quo Vadis," a variety show, a revival of "The Silver King," the Drury Lane extravaganza "Sleeping Beauty," the Third Avenue plumber's delight "Mr. Wu," the girl shows called "The Cinema Star" and "The Marriage Market," a vaudeville bill at the Palace, and "Grumpy" at the New Theatre.

The war year of 1915 saw Queen Alexandra, Princess Victoria and Princess Maude of Fife forgetting their troubles at a musical comedy named



"Betty" and the Queen and Princess Mary taking in "Potash and Perlmutter" and the vaudeville show at the Coliseum—the King remaining away from the theatre save on the occasion of war benefit performances. In the subsequent war year of 1916, the Prince of Wales, accompanied by Prince Albert, went to the Palace to lay an eye to the cuties in "The Passing Show"; the Queen, accompanied by the Grand Duchess George of Russia, took in "Puss in Boots" at Drury Lane; the same ladies, joined by the Princess Victoria, the following week (Jan. 18) went to a vaudeville show; the same ladies—the King still remaining away from the theatre—on May 29 took in "Peg o' My Heart"; and the Queen, on July 10, sat alone through a something called "The Bing Boys Are Here." And the seasons of 1917–1919 saw the movie called "Intolerance," Al Woods' "Friendly Enemies," a couple of vaudeville shows, Edward Sheldon's "Romance" and a revival of Sydney Grundy's "Pair of Spectacles" the especial marks of the aristocratic favour.

During these dozen years, while the aristocratic eye was popping at the hack comedies of Carton, the blood and thunder melodramas of Drury Lane, the red-vest vaudeville acts at the Alhambra and the shapely legs of the Adelphi chorus girls, there

were being presented just around the corner—and passed up—the great plays of the great dramatic writers of all time, ancient and modern. In 1907, with Hauptmann's "Sunken Bell" at the Waldorf, His Majesty went instead to Somerset Maugham's "Lady Frederick" at the Court. In 1908, with D'Annunzio's "La Figlia di Jorio" at the Shaftesbury, Her Majesty elected instead a musical comedy by Adrian Ross and Leslie Stuart in which Laurence Grossmith was springing comical jokes. In 1909, with Calderon at the Aldwych and Oliver Goldsmith at the Haymarket, the Prince and Princess of Wales voted for Gladys Cooper's rendition of a Blanche Ring song in a Gaiety show and for a vaudeville bill at the Empire. In 1910, with Shakespeare at the Court and Shaw at the Duke of York's, the royal family made instead for a Paul Armstrong melodrama at the Comedy and a look at Emmy Whelen at Daly's. With Synge, Schnitzler, Galsworthy, Hervieu playing down the block, Buckingham Palace has ever generally selected instead a bedroom farce, a crook melodrama or a leg show.

Let us therefore under the circumstances invite our American professors to make dramatic criticism somewhat safer for democracy.

THE END









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